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Dallas County Promise: Exploring Implementation, Outcomes, and Practitioner Perspectives

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by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Dallas County Promise: Exploring Implementation, Outcomes, and Practitioner Perspectives

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This study sought to understand the Dallas County Promise Program, a last-dollar community college Promise program introduced in Texas in 2017. I examined the implementation of the program in participating high schools, and available early evidence of changes in enrollment in two-year community college and four-year college since the program was introduced. Finally, I sought to better understand the experiences of college counseling staff and administrators implementing the program at the school level, and their perceptions of the potential impacts of the program on their students. The study involved a mixed qualitative and quantitative research design, consisting of a combination of exploratory quantitative data analysis, along with document analysis and participant interviews. Exploratory quantitative analyses examined available datasets for changes in college enrollment rates for graduates from participating high schools before and after the program's introduction. Qualitative research methods such as interviews additionally sought to give voice to the experiences of practitioners involved in the

first three cohort years, and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the implementation and outcomes of the program. The findings both support and extend what is understood about the impact of last-dollar community college Promise programs on college enrollment. Although the overall number of graduates from Promise High Schools enrolling in higher education in Texas increased since the introduction of Dallas County Promise, the increase is seen primarily in the two-year college sector. A parallel decrease in graduates enrolling in a four-year institution suggests that at least some students who would have been eligible to attend a four-year institution decided to enroll in community college instead. This type of shift in college enrollment should be examined further as the program continues to ensure alignment of program goals and outcomes for equity, especially for underrepresented minority and low-income students. My findings suggest a need to carefully consider the design of the program and offers potential suggestions for improving Dallas County Promise and similar programs to increase higher education enrollment and success for the target populations of students.

The dissertation of Derek Terrell is approved.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my family, both biological and chosen. The love and support you have given me throughout this program and my life have been invaluable. It is because of you that I have made it to this point, and it because of you that I to continue to push forward.

To my nieces and nephews, no matter the number of degrees or titles I hold, being your uncle will always be the most meaningful and rewarding of them all.

To my mom and dad, thank you for always believing in me and supporting me in all my academic endeavors. And now, for the last time, it is with great joy that I can say, “Yes, I am finished with my homework.”

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To the counselors and administrators in Dallas who continue to support and believe in the limitless potential of your students regardless of what zip codes and statistics predict, thank you for the work you do each day. And to the students of Dallas whom I have been fortunate enough to meet throughout my career, you are an inspiration to all those around you and all those who are following in your footsteps. Stay true to yourselves and continue reaching for the stars.

VITA

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CHAPTER 1: THE PROBLEM

Introduction

College enrollment and completion rates vary by where one lives, with noticeable differences even across states with students having higher rates of degree attainment in more affluent areas (Perna & Finney, 2014). These disparities point to social and racial inequities in our education system as more White and affluent students are accessing higher education and receiving degrees, compared to their less resourced and racially minoritized counterparts. These differences in attainment contribute to the continued economic and social stratification of our society, as students from historically underrepresented racial groups and lower-income households may not be able to enjoy the financial and social benefits that come along with access to higher education and degree attainment (Perna & Finney, 2014).

Educational disparities across ethnic groups must be addressed as the demographics of the United States are changing. At the current rate of educational attainment in the United States, labor experts predict that by 2025 we will be 23 million degree holders short of meeting the growing workforce demands (Matthews, 2014). In addition to the expanding of sectors of the U.S. economy that require more highly educated workers such as healthcare, education, and business services; advancement and changes in technology are also increasing the demand for more educated workers even in sectors of service and manufacturing (Carnevale & Rose, 2015). Ensuring that all people can participate in and benefit from high-quality higher education is important for reasons of social justice, as well as for the economic and social prosperity of our communities, states, and nation (Perna & Finney, 2014).

In addition to the inequities in higher education access, over the past few decades the sticker price of college has dramatically increased (Perna & Smith, 2020), acting as an additional

barrier to college access and completion. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, over the 30-year period from 1989 to 2019, median family income in the United States increased by 26% after adjusting for inflation. However, still adjusting for inflation, average published tuition and fees at public two-year institutions are 2.08 times as high in 2020-21 as they were in 1990-91 (more than double), and 2.78 times and 2.03 times as high for public four-year and private, nonprofit four-year institutions, respectively **(**Ma et al., 2020**).** There have also been fundamental changes in the ways states and the federal government finance higher education with the federal government shifting from using grants as the primary means of promoting higher education to using loans (Paulsen & St. John, 2002). Decreases in state support for public higher education has led to increases in tuition charges and has shifted a larger portion of financial burden on students and their families (Paulsen & St. John, 2002). These rising costs of higher education have also led to increased levels of postsecondary debt among U.S. college graduates, with average debt levels increasing by nearly $20,000 between 1993 to 2012 (McDonough et al., 2015). These trends are particularly worrisome for families with the least amount of knowledge about the college-going process, such as low-income and first-generation Latino students (McDonough et al., 2015).

An emerging educational innovation being used to address this issue and increase higher education attainment are College Promise programs, also known as “free tuition” and “free college” programs as they put forth a commitment to provide some portion of tuition or college attendance costs for students. With the rising costs of higher education, Promise programs can aid in reducing the cost of college, in addition to changing behaviors and aspirations during the college choice process (Billings, 2018). Perna and Leigh (2018) further define College Promise programs as having three criteria: 1) the central goal of increasing higher education attainment;

2) a "place-based" student eligibility requirement (e.g. attending a specific school, living in a designated state/city) in addition to, or in lieu of academic or need-based criteria and 3) a financial award beyond existing federal and state aid to offset the costs of college. These programs often have an emphasis on increasing access for underrepresented minorities, low-income, and/or first generation to college students in particular areas or communities (Perna & Leigh, 2018).

Kim et al. (2009) found that students from different race and income groups respond differentially to financial aid packages in their application and enrollment decisions depending upon their level of aid expectation, and these expectations along with concerns about college affordability may indirectly influence their college choice process. The belief that a students' inability or perceptions of inability to pay for college should not deter a student from pursuing higher education is a principal motivation for College Promise programs (Gándara & Li, 2020; Grodsky & Jones, 2007; Paulsen & St. John, 2002; Tierney & Venegas, 2009). Thus, Promise programs can potentially increase higher education attainment by breaking down the perception of unaffordability or by covering the actual costs associated with college attendance.

Background of the Problem

According to the *College Promise Campaign*, a non-profit initiative started in September 2015, there were 53 Promise programs across the nation in 2015, but as of 2021, there were nearly 350 Promise programs underway across 47 states. Two programs in particular have contributed to the popularity and proliferation of Promise programs nationwide—the Indiana 21st Century Scholars program, the first statewide college Promise program, and the Kalamazoo Promise, the first local level Promise program (Kelchen, 2017). The 21st Century Scholars program began in 1990 and various research conducted on the program has found it to have

positive effects on college aspirations, enrollment rates, and persistence rates for students who participated in the program. Similarly, numerous research studies have been done on the Kalamazoo Promise since its beginnings in 2005. These studies found that the program contributed to a college enrollment increase of about 25% in the Kalamazoo public schools and significantly improved educational outcomes such as increasing the percentage of eligible high school graduates who earned a college credential by 12 percentage points (Kelchen, 2017; Swanson et al., 2016).

Communities and states are seeing potential positive impacts of College Promise programs and are responding to this by creating their own due to their common goal of "increasing the number of college graduates to meet the economic, social, and civic demands of a prosperous nation" (College Promise Campaign, 2020). Just as College Promise programs have grown in popularity, so has the research and literature around their design, implementation, and impact on higher education attainment. Under the direction of Dr. Laura Perna, a comprehensive database of College Promise programs was created which categorizes these programs based on Perna & Leigh's (2018) analysis of program characteristics. The seven categories listed in Table 1.1 provide a useful framework for understanding differences in programmatic approaches.

Table 1.1

Categories of College Promise Programs Derived from Perna & Leigh's (2018) Typology

State need-based aid programs	Award aid to state residents with financial need who attend in-state two-year or four-year institutions
State merit-based aid programs	Award aid to state residents who meet academic criteria and attend in-state two-year or four-year institutions
Four-year institution programs	Award aid to students who attend one specified in-state four-year institution
Place-based programs	Award aid to individuals who are in the designated place for at least two years
Last-dollar community college programs	Provide last-dollar awards to attend a community college
First-dollar community college programs	Provide first-dollar awards to attend a community college
Universal eligibility programs	Award aid without consideration of financial need or academic achievement.

Note. Adapted from *College Promise Programs A Comprehensive Catalog of College Promise Programs in the United States*, by L. Perna. 2021 (https://ahead-penn.org/creating-knowledge/college-promise). Copyright 2021 Penn GSE.

As evidenced through these seven categories, College Promise programs can vary greatly, and these programs differ primarily in their participating postsecondary institutions, aid-eligibility criteria, and aid-disbursement guidelines (Perna & Leigh, 2018). An example of the difference in aid-disbursement guidelines are the last-dollar and first-dollar approach to Promise fund distribution. Last-dollar programs require students to exhaust all other state and federal financial aid—such as Pell Grants—before receiving Promise funds, meaning last-dollar awards are reduced by financial aid received from the federal or state government and other sources. First-dollar programs do not have the requirement for other sources of aid to be used first,

therefore the amount of a first-dollar award is not influenced by whether students receive any other financial aid (Perna & Leigh, 2018; Gándara & Li, 2020).

With the various types of programs and their growing popularity, it is necessary to understand that each is unique in the students and communities that they serve, as well as their intended and actual impact on students and higher education attainment (Perna & Smith, 2020). In recent years there has been more research conducted on the impacts of these programs and who benefits from them. According to Miller-Adams (2015), Promise programs seek to transform their communities by investing in place-based scholarships and three categories of potential impacts are local economic development, K-12 academic achievement, and postsecondary outcomes. Swanson et al. (2016) reviewed sixteen primary studies of the impacts of various Promise programs, seven of which examined postsecondary outcomes and considered one or more of the following: college applications submitted, enrollment in college, persistence, credits earned, and degrees completed. Swanson et al. (2016) found that Promise programs of all designs have the potential to improve postsecondary outcomes, playing a substantial part in not only the magnitude of the positive effects, but also influences the postsecondary options—a two-year community college versus a four-year college or university— that students choose to pursue. Research also demonstrates that the effects of a Promise program on enrollment of students from different racial and ethnic groups vary based on program features, such as eligibility requirements (Gándara & Li, 2020). Not only program design, but recent studies highlight the importance of implementation on Promise program outcomes, especially as they pertain to equity (Perna et al., 2021; Perna & Smith, 2020).

The Problem in a Local Context

Addressing disparities in college access and enrollment for underrepresented populations is of utmost importance and Promise programs have been proven to have the potential in improving postsecondary outcomes, such as college enrollment. This research provides the opportunity to further understand and examine the program implementation and early outcomes for a relatively new last-dollar community college Promise program in Texas, the Dallas County Promise. Dallas County is the second largest county in Texas and the ninth most populous in the country, and according to the *US Census Bureau* (2020), the Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan area has seen the largest numeric population growth since 2010 of over 1.2 million people. Even though Dallas is one of the fastest growing economic regions in the country, the number of people living in poverty has increased 42% over the last 15 years and only 37% of adults have a two- or four-year degree. According to the most recent longitudinal study from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), only 10% of eighth-grade students from low-income families in Dallas County earned a two- or four-year degree within six years of their high school graduation and fewer than three in ten Dallas County graduates complete college within six years.

There are currently ten college Promise programs throughout the state of Texas that meet the criteria derived from Perna and Leigh's (2018) typology and are included in the comprehensive database. The Dallas County Promise is one of the three last-dollar community college programs in Texas and is available to graduates from one of the participating Dallas County high schools. The goals as stated by the Dallas County Promise (2021) are to 1) help high schools ensure all students graduate college and career ready, 2) help colleges and universities achieve 60x30TX with equity for Dallas (a statewide initiative to have at least 60%

of Texans between the age of 25-34 with a certificate or degree by 2030) and 3) to help workforce solve the talent gap. The program is funded by the Dallas County Community College District (DCCCD) Foundation and offers free tuition for up to three years or for an associate's degree at one of seven DCCCD colleges, now collectively known as just *Dallas College*. The Dallas County Promise began in the 2017-2018 academic year, so with only three cohorts of high school graduates the long-term effects and postsecondary outcomes cannot yet be examined. Instead, this study aims to explore and understand the implementation and potential impact of the Dallas County Promise program on students and their short-term postsecondary outcomes, guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the characteristics of the Dallas County Promise Program and how is it being implemented in the target schools?
2. How did college enrollment rates change for graduates from participating Dallas County Promise high schools following the introduction of the program?
    a. To what extent did their choice to enroll at a 2-year or community college change?
    b. To what extent did their choice to enroll at a 4-year college change?
3. How do practitioners perceive the Dallas County Promise Program is impacting or benefitting students?
4. What do practitioners believe can be done to improve program implementation and its outcomes?

Significance of the Study

The first cohort of Dallas County Promise schools consisted of 31 schools with approximately 9,300 graduating seniors and in the second year, the number of participating

schools rose to 43 and had a total of approximately 16,500 graduating seniors who were eligible for the Dallas County Promise. That list has since grown to 57 high schools representing 11 schools districts in Dallas and 22,000 high school seniors. According to the Texas Education Agency (2019), approximately 21.5% of Dallas County 2019 graduates were African American, 71% were Hispanic, and over 76% of all graduates were considered economically disadvantaged. This means that the introduction of the Dallas County Promise Program in 2017 and its subsequent impacts have the potential to affect a large number of students—many of those being African American and Hispanic/Latinx students and low-income students. These populations of students are often the most disadvantaged when it comes to quality, access, and opportunity in both K-12 and higher education (May & Chubin, 2003); thus ensuring that students in Dallas, many whom are from these groups, have the opportunity to participate in and benefit from high-quality higher education is important for not just for reasons of social justice, but also for the economic and social prosperity of our communities, states, and nation (Perna & Finney, 2014).

In the following chapter, I dive deeper into the existing literature on the role that Promise programs play in the landscape of higher education, specifically last-dollar community college Promise programs. Additionally, I address the existing models and frameworks on college choice as they relate to human capital and sociological and cultural ecological approaches, and how the existing literature on program implementation and implementation fidelity frameworks further support the need for this study and future studies on last-dollar Promise programs.

In Chapter Three, I present the methods I employed to address the research questions listed above. Document analysis of Dallas County Promise documents and reports was performed to explore the characteristics of the Dallas County Promise and structured interviews with college counseling/advising staff working in a participating high school and an

administrator were also used to collect qualitative data to supply additional insight into the program and the actual implementation. Analyses of datasets provided by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) allowed me to gain an understanding of the participating high schools and their college enrollment trends. The structured interviews again provided deeper insight into the trends and revealed the perception of the administrator and counselors about the potential impacts of the Promise on students and their recommendations for the program regarding design and implementation.

The population of Dallas is increasing rapidly and consists of higher percentages of lower-income and underrepresented minority students—specifically African American and Hispanic/Latinx students—than the state overall and research shows those student populations have inequitable access and lower rates of higher education attainment than their White and more affluent counterparts (Cahalan et al., 2018; Ma et al., 2016). Like many Promise programs, Dallas County Promise seeks to help more Dallas County students complete college and begin careers (Dallas County Promise, 2021). Although Dallas County Promise is in its early stages, it is important to examine the implementation of the program and explore some of the potential impacts of the program on postsecondary outcomes such as college enrollment, to ensure the Dallas County Promise is working successfully toward its goals of increasing higher education attainment for all students.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

State and local policymakers, K-12 and higher education leaders, and philanthropic organizations are realizing the social and economic benefits of a college-educated society and with the rising costs of college and growing need for training beyond high school to obtain a well-paying job—there have been innovations in college access and completion over the last two decades (Ma et al., 2019). While America's schools are becoming increasingly diverse, they are also becoming more segregated based on race and poverty. Black and Hispanic/Latinx students—along with students from low-income backgrounds—are most impacted by these educational inequities, which also obstructs their readiness for and access to college (Oakes, 2005; Orfield & Frankenberg, 2014). No one innovation or reform alone will be able to address the many deeply embedded structural forces that continue to hinder higher education access and attainment for historically underrepresented students (Perna, 2016; Perna & Finney, 2014). Nevertheless, place-based scholarships, such as Promise programs, have emerged as a critical element of community-based strategies to support low-income and historically underrepresented students in achieving future success (Miller-Adams & Smith, 2018).

Promise programs differ from other forms of aid as eligibility for Promise programs is generally simpler and more transparent than for other financial aid programs and students are typically eligible for a Promise program if they live within a specific geographic region or attend a particular school/district and meet other minimal and widely publicized criteria (Perna & Leigh, 2018). Whether explicitly stated or not, equity concerns about increasing access to higher education for those least likely to attend college and earn a degree is central to most Promise programs, as is evidenced in the location of most programs in communities or school districts

with large numbers of economically disadvantaged students (Miller-Adams & Smith, 2018). Promise programs of all designs have the potential to improve postsecondary outcomes and influence postsecondary options that students choose to pursue (Swanson et al., 2016). However, research has shown that the effects of a Promise program on enrollment of students from different racial and ethnic groups varies based on program design and features, such as eligibility requirements (Gándara & Li, 2020) and they highlight the importance of implementation on Promise program outcomes, especially as they pertain to equity (Perna et al., 2021; Perna & Smith, 2020).

Theoretical Frameworks

According to the literature on college choice, the college choice process can be broken down into three stages, beginning as early as 7th grade and ending when a student matriculates to a postsecondary institution (Billings, 2018; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Hossler et al., 1989). The *predisposition* stage is considered the first stage and is when students develop educational and occupational aspirations. This is when students make the decision as to whether they want to continue formal education beyond high school, enrolling in a college preparatory curriculum and focus on maintaining their academic performance (Billings, 2018; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Hossler et al., 1989).

The second stage known as *search* is when students seek out information on colleges and develop a tentative list of institutions that are of interest to them. This information can come directly from a variety of sources, such as visits to campuses, information sessions, brochures, and college promotional materials. It may also come indirectly through friends, family, or guidance counselors (Hossler et al., 1989).

During *choice*, the last stage of the college choice process, students will apply to colleges and universities, receive offers of admission, and ultimately decide which institution to attend. Their decision whether to attend and which college to attend is based on a combination of both individual and institutional characteristics. In addition to applying for admission, during this "choice" stage, students also decide whether to apply for financial aid and if eligible they will receive financial aid packages for the colleges to which they have been admitted (Billings, 2018; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Hossler et al., 1989).

Although these stages exist, traditional college-choice model such as this are linear and do not account for the larger macro-system in which students and families prepare for college (Yamamura et al., 2010). I proposed a model on college choice which draws on both Perna's (2006) conceptual model and Tierney and Venegas' (2009) cultural ecological model to explore the potential impacts on college enrollment of the place-based last-dollar program, the Dallas County Promise.

Perna's (2006) conceptual model draws on constructs from both human capital and sociological approaches and assumes that a student's college choice decisions are shaped by four contextual layers: 1) the individual's habitus—internalized system of thoughts, perceptions, and beliefs acquired from their surroundings; 2) school and community context; 3) the higher education context and 4) the broader social, economic, and policy context. This approach addresses the concern by some researchers that policy interventions will not effectively close gaps in student college choice without recognizing the culture and circumstances of certain groups of students (Freeman, 1997). Instead, the conceptual model relies on the assumption that the pattern of educational attainment may vary across racial/ethnic, socioeconomic, and other groups; and is not universal (Paulsen & St. John, 2002; St. John & Asker, 2001). This conceptual

model also incorporates the perspectives of four major stakeholders in the college-choice process: students (and their parents or guardians); K-12 institutions; higher education institutions; and public policymakers—making it useful for understanding differences across groups in college-choice outcomes as it recognizes multiple layers of context that influence a student's college-related decisions (Perna, 2016). A student's social class, cultural capital, and habitus also influence how cost-conscious students are and even how they conceive financial issues as part of the college-going decision (McDonough, 1997). Both the economic and sociological approach of Perna's model portray low-income students as sensitive to financial considerations and academic preparation for college (St. John et al., 1996). Additional research shows that African American students are more sensitive to college costs than White students; and community college students—which includes a large portion of low-income and underrepresented minority students—are also more sensitive to college costs than students attending other types of institutions (Heller, 1997; Leslie & Brinkman, 1988). Perna's (2006) conceptual model describes the factors that affect students' thinking about college, but the cultural ecological model posits that there are multiple environmental influences that play a role in access to financial aid and that the commitment to financial aid is foundational to college going and rational choice (Tierney & Venegas, 2009). The cultural ecological model further builds upon Perna's (2006) conceptual model by adding that similarly to college access, access to financial aid is also contextually driven (Tierney & Venegas, 2009). The commitment of financial aid drives this cultural framework, which assumes that the various contexts in which students are situated will have a direct impact on how they receive, interpret, and act on messages about financial aid and affordability (Tierney & Venegas, 2009). Recommendations from Tierney and Venegas (2009) include understanding the lives of students and families when

developing financial aid policies, investigating the interrelationship of issues faced by students, and creating a systemic and longitudinal framework for information about financial aid to help students navigate the financial aid application process.

In addition to the models and frameworks on college choice, this study also looked at implementation fidelity frameworks to understand contextual forces that influence Promise program outcomes and design (Harris et al., 2020; Perna et al., 2021). As a place-based, last-dollar community college Promise program; examining Dallas County Promise through these frameworks and models is necessary as context in program design and implementation matter (Harris et al., 2020), and furthermore whether a Promise program improves or reduces equity depends highly on implementation (Perna & Smith, 2020).

The Role and Impact of Promise Programs

The central goal of College Promise programs is to increase higher education attainment, often with an emphasis on increasing access for underrepresented minorities, low-income, and/or first generation to college students in particular areas or communities (Perna & Leigh, 2016). College Promise programs can directly lower the costs of college by reducing the amount of tuition and fees, breaking down financial barriers to higher education. Promise programs may also potentially help students develop positive attitudes toward attending college through the messaging that college is affordable and attainable—possibly even changing students' behaviors and higher education aspirations (Heller, 2006; Schwartz, 2008). According to Billings (2018), this is of particular importance for low-income and first-generation students who tend to overestimate the cost of college and underestimate the amount of financial aid that is available; and could influence those students to engage in positive academic behaviors such as enrolling in rigorous college preparatory courses and putting more time and effort into their schoolwork.

Although many Promise program stakeholders view degree attainment as the primary outcome of interest, extant literature also explores the effects of Promise programs on college aspirations and academic preparation and college choice and enrollment (Miller-Adams and Smith, 2018; Swanson et al., 2016).

College Aspirations and Academic Preparation

Some researchers believe that the simple message of "free college" by Promise programs helps students and families understand the value and affordability of higher education (Goldrick-Rab & Miller-Adams, 2008). With the early awareness of the value of a college degree and money available to pay for it, students' college aspirations may be cultivated earlier and may also inspire them to take academically rigorous courses and other steps that are helpful for matriculation in college (Perna, 2016; Perna, 2010). Promise programs can also motivate school leaders to implement strategies that improve the college-going culture and increase college-going expectations among not just students, but also teachers, counselors, and administrators (Ash & Ritter, 2016; Miron et al., 2012).

Prior research on the Kalamazoo Promise—a place-based, universal eligibility program with a first-dollar approach—showed that between 2007-2014, Kalamazoo Public School students increased their enrollment in rigorous college preparatory courses and students noticed an increase in their classmates' motivation to succeed due to the Kalamazoo Promise (Miron et al., 2012). Additionally, researchers found that teachers in Kalamazoo Public Schools changed their beliefs, expectations, and behaviors after the announcement of the Kalamazoo Promise and felt a sense of excitement and urgency to prepare all students to succeed in college to avoid missing out on the Promise scholarship. Billings (2018) stated that these changes in students' preparation for college and an increased level of support from the school district may have

shifted which postsecondary institutions students chose to attend as the students' stronger academic profiles allowed them to not only apply and compete for admission to selective four-year colleges, but also increased their likelihood of being awarded institutional merit scholarships, making more institutions affordable.

College Choice and College Enrollment

College enrollment is one of the most examined outcomes of Promise programs and several studies have found increased college enrollment among eligible Promise students (Bartik et al., 2015; Page & Iriti, 2016; Snyder et al., 2016; Swanson & Ritter, 2018). The El Dorado Promise in Arkansas led to an 11% increase in overall college enrollment among eligible students compared with ineligible students in the El Dorado Public School District and led to an estimated 13% increase in postsecondary enrollment for Promise-eligible students of color, as well as a 21% increase in college enrollment among those with below-average GPAs (Swanson & Ritter, 2018). Positive enrollment effects were even seen for students who graduated five years after the program was first introduced and researchers speculated that students had heard of the value of the Promise and college from 8th through 12th grade and believed this reflected the importance of an increased college-going culture (Swanson & Ritter, 2018).

Research by Bartik et al. (2015) on the Kalamazoo Promise found that within six months of graduating high school that students who were eligible for the Kalamazoo Promise were more likely to enroll in college by 8% and were more likely to attain any postsecondary degree by 9% to 12% within six years of graduating high school. Low-income students were also 9% more likely to send their test scores to Michigan State University and 11% less likely to send them to Kalamazoo Valley Community College. The researchers concluded that the Kalamazoo Promise

changed the college choice set for low-income students, as the scholarship allowed them to consider more selective, four-year institutions (Andrews et al., 2010).

One of the most common findings in Promise research and college choice is that students shift their college choice toward institutions where they can use their scholarships. Promise programs that allow students to use their aid at either two- or four-year colleges tend to result in higher rates of four-year enrollment, while programs that restrict attendance to community colleges increase enrollment at these institutions, at times at the expense of four-year enrollment (Miller-Adams & Smith, 2018). Carruthers and Fox (2016) identified increases in enrollment at two-year colleges, but not at four-year colleges in their evaluation of Knox Achieves, the Knox County last-dollar program which motivated the passage of the statewide Tennessee Promise program. Although the results were statistically insignificant, all the estimates for the effect of the Knox Achieves on enrollment at four-year institutions were in fact negative and decreased students' likelihood to enroll in a four-year college. However, they did find that program participants were more likely to graduate from high school and enroll at a postsecondary institution immediately after graduation, with the largest increase among lower-income students (Carruthers & Fox, 2016).

Programs that limit awards to community colleges may increase enrollment at those particular institutions, but that gain in community college enrollment may be primarily from students who would have otherwise enrolled at four-year institution (Carruthers & Fox, 2016). Although those students may still be pursuing higher education, it is necessary to acknowledge that research shows degree completion to be lower for first-time, full-time freshman at community colleges than their counterparts at four-year universities by about 28.5% (Snyder et al., 2018). Furthermore, only about a third of community college students will transfer to a 4-

year institution and the likelihood of a student transferring decreases for students from the lower quintiles of socioeconomic status (Ma & Baum, 2016).

Variations in Promise Program Design

Promise programs can vary greatly, and these programs differ primarily in their participating postsecondary institutions, aid-eligibility criteria, and aid-disbursement guidelines (Perna & Leigh, 2018). Perna and Smith (2020) found that these variations in program design may be appropriate given the benefits of adapting a program to meet the priorities and needs of the local and state context. Other research even suggested that given variations in the assets and needs and in the resources available to promote higher education attainment across different communities, that heterogeneity in program design may be essential to improve education attainment for underserved groups (Miller-Adams, 2009; Perna, 2006**)**. However, Miller-Adams and Smith (2018) found the effects of Promise programs vary with program design and thus suggest that program design should reflect stakeholder goals to create the incentives necessary to accomplish what stakeholders hope to achieve. For example, a last-dollar program in a community with low college-going rates and serving large numbers of historically underserved students may have different implications than a last-dollar program in a community with high college-going rates and few underserved students (Millet at al., 2020). Miller-Adams and Smith (2018) assert that it is essential to explore how design features shape impact.

Aid-Disbursement Guidelines

An example of the difference in program design is in aid-disbursement guidelines of last-dollar and first-dollar approaches to Promise fund distribution. First-dollar awards are not influenced by whether students receive any other financial aid (Perna & Leigh, 2018; Gándara & Li, 2020). Thus, first-dollar promise programs provide higher average awards to low-income

students than last-dollar programs, as low-income students are typically eligible for federal and state need-based grant aid (Perna & Leigh, 2018). Last-dollar promise programs require students to exhaust all other state and federal financial aid before receiving promise funds, meaning last-dollar awards are reduced by financial aid received from the federal or state government and other sources. Critics of last-dollar promise programs argue that funding actually tends to go to middle-income and higher-income students and distribute little aid to lower-income students who have tuition and fees covered primarily by their Pell Grants and other state grant aid for which they qualify (Poutre & Voight, 2018; Gándara & Li, 2020).

Promise programs are more commonly last-dollar programs rather than first-dollar. They are less expensive per student, so although they may serve more students with the financial resources, they also provided smaller amounts of money to students from lower income families (Perna & Smith, 2020). In fact, they may provide no financial award to low-income students attending a community college, as the maximum Pell Grant typically exceeds average tuition and fees at public two-year institutions (Harnisch & Lebioda, 2016; Perna et al., 2018). Until recently, few studies examined the effect of last-dollar programs, and they are still underrepresented in the research on Promise programs and their effects on postsecondary outcomes. Last-dollar award programs were found to provide lower average awards to students from lower income families, especially those who are eligible for the Pell Grant. This further exacerbates inequity by providing no new resources to students from the lowest-income families and instead allocating resources to students from higher-income families who would have likely enrolled in college without the aid (Perna et al., 2018). This is evidenced through the Oregon Promise, where they predicted that 60 percent of their Promise funding would be received by

students in the highest two quintiles of EFC and only 17% of the funding would go to students in the two lowest quintiles (Gurantz, 2020).

A recent study on the Tennessee Promise by the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) found that the program had a significant and positive effect on enrollment of first-time, full-time, degree-seeking students at two-year public institutions, however, Tennessee Promise students tended to be more advantaged in terms of parent education and family income (House & Dell, 2020). Another study by Rios-Aguilar and Lyke (2020) found that with Promise programs in California, there was an uneven distribution of the "Promise" (AB 19) funds across racial and ethnic subgroups and warned that failing to examine in-depth whether the California College Promise is meeting its goals could actually continue to perpetuate inequities in college access and completion.

Participating Postsecondary Institutions

Research suggests that there are far fewer first-dollar programs that allow students to attend both two-year or four-year schools although there has been a proven increase college in enrollment and degree attainment with these programs (Swanson et al., 2016). And while last-dollar, community college programs may boost college enrollment, they may also shift enrollment toward two-year colleges and have unknown implications for degree completion (Miller-Adams & Smith, 2018). Perna and Smith (2020) recommend considering the implications of restrictions on the postsecondary institutions which students may attend for a full set of college-related outcomes. One such outcome is degree attainment and last-dollar community college programs may have limited impact on degree attainment since completion rates are lower at two-year than at a four-year colleges and universities and transfer rates tend to

be low, even for students who enter with the goal of earning a bachelor's degree (Snyder et al., 2018).

Community colleges provide a key point of access to higher education for millions of low-income and underrepresented minority students, with over half of low-income students beginning their postsecondary education at a two-year institution (Berkner & Choy, 2008). According to Rhoads & Valadez (1996), community colleges were created to democratize higher education for students of color and low-income groups. This still holds true as the most recent College Board Research Brief on trends in community college show White and Asian first-time, full-time students are much more likely to be enrolled at public four-year institutions than at community colleges, while Black and Hispanic first-time full-time students are disproportionately represented in the public two-year and for-profit sectors (Ma & Baum, 2016). A report from 2014 showed that of all first-time, full-time undergraduates enrolled in higher education, 43% of all Hispanic/Latinx students and 36% of all Black students were in community college, while only 23% of Asian and 28% of White students were enrolled in community college. This is of particular importance as nearly half (49.2%) of all postsecondary students begin their college journey in a two-year institution (Shapiro et al., 2015).

Even though so many students start at two-year institution, the reality is that most community college students do not complete a credential, even when allowing six years and counting credentials earned after transferring (Ma & Baum, 2016). These numbers are even more alarming when considering Black, Hispanic/Latinx, and low-income students. According to a 2019 update from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), within three years of attending a community college, only 23% of Black students had obtained a credential. The percentage was higher for Hispanic students with 30% obtaining a credential within three years.

However, their White and Asian counterparts obtained a credential at higher percentages, 32% and 36% respectively. Additionally, students who start at a public two-year institution and are Pell Grant recipients were less likely to receive a credential than those whose income does not qualify them to receive the Pell Grant (Snyder et al., 2018).

With open-admissions policies, flexible scheduling options, and tuition and fees at about a third of average in-state, public four-year tuition and fees—many students aspiring to a bachelor's degree may be drawn to community colleges, seeing it as a bargain (Xu et al., 2018). Additionally, most potential students live geographically close to at least one community college and this can allow them to avoid on average $9,804 in room and board charges per year (Ma & Baum, 2016). Living in low-income areas that consist of low education attainment prospects may also contribute to students enrolling in local community colleges (Reyes et al., 2019). And aspiring bachelor's degree students who spend their first two years at a community college might expect to save over $30,000 on the total cost of a bachelor's degree. However, even considering these up-front savings, community colleges are not necessarily the most cost-effective pathway to earning a bachelor's degree considering that although 81% of community college entrants aspire to transfer to a four-year college, only 6% do so within five years (Xu et al., 2018; Horn & Skomsvold, 2011) and nationwide only 39% of students who first enrolled in a community college in Fall 2010 completed a degree at any two-year or four-year institution within six years (Ma & Baum, 2016).

Aid Eligibility Criteria

Eligibility for Promise programs is generally simpler and more transparent than other financial aid programs, as students are eligible for a Promise program if they attend a certain school or live within a particular geographic region and meet other minimal, widely publicized

criteria (Perna & Leigh, 2018). Since eligibility criteria are simpler, Promise programs tend to impose less burdens on students and their families in terms of paperwork (Deming & Dynarski, 2010). This is particularly true of programs that disburse Promise aid regardless of financial need or other aid receipt, such a first-dollar programs since this approach does not require completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Need based programs and last-dollar Promise programs typically impose more administrative burden on students and families as they require additional paperwork to determine eligibility and receive aid (Gándara & Li, 2020). Requiring students to file a FAFSA reduces the cost of funding a last-dollar program must provide by leveraging the availability of need-based aid provided by the federal and state governments. Policymakers and those designing Promise programs must consider the unintended consequences for equity in eligibility criteria for aid, such as completing the FAFSA as it could also exclude undocumented and DACA students who are often not eligible for federal or state aid (Perna & Smith, 2020).

Deming & Dynarksi (2010) found that more targeted programs that require means testing for financial eligibility had smaller effects on increasing college enrollment than programs with simpler eligibility requirements such as statewide merit aid programs. Programs with merit criteria also tend to yield smaller boosts in college enrollment since the targeted students are often likely to enroll in colleges even without a Promise scholarship (Miller-Adams & Smith, 2018). Programs with academic eligibility requirements may negatively impact or reduce equity since awarding benefits only to students who meet academic eligibility requirements may disproportionately exclude students from groups that are historically underrepresented in higher education (Perna & Smith, 2020; Perna et al., 2021).

Although one goal of Promise programs is also to promote local posterity, requiring a long-term residency requirement to receive full financial aid award may disadvantage groups such as African Americans, low-income families, and undocumented immigrants that are more likely to be forced to relocate in response to landlord practices, failures in housing quality, domestic conflict, or even violence in their neighborhood (DeLuca et al., 2013). Again, policymakers and program administrators must take these concerns into consideration when designing and planning implementation of Promise programs (Perna & Smith, 2020).

Promise Program Implementation

Implementation is neither top-down or bottom-up, but rather is influenced by a combination of actions by top-level administrators and on the ground "service deliverers" (Matland, 1995). In the case of Promise programs, these service deliverers would be college counselors and advisors who serve as institutional agents, providing access to resources and opportunities on the Promise program and college more broadly (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). According to McDonough (2005), counselors are the most important professionals in schools when it comes to improving college enrollments for students. Whether a Promise program improves or reduces equity highly depends on its implementation and the consequences of an implemented program for equity depends on the program content (i.e., financial award and non-financial academic supports) and coverage, which is determined by eligibility requirements (Perna & Smith, 2020; Perna et al., 2021). Implementation fidelity frameworks put forth that contextual forces influence the content and coverage of implemented programs; and content and coverage are moderated by programmatic characteristics such as program goals, program staffing, and recruitment strategies (Perna et al., 2021). More specifically, program characteristics can include 1) strategies for providing "training, monitoring, and feedback for

those delivering the intervention," and 2) "participant responsiveness" which includes perceptions of, and engagement with, the intervention among those eligible to receive it and those who deliver it (Carroll et al., 2007; Hasson, 2010).

Contextual conditions, such as organizational and community contexts, may also moderate implementation (Durlak & DuPre, 2008; McLaughlin, 1987; Perna et al., 2021). Durlak and DuPre (2008) posit that organizational capacity, decision-making and communication practices and processes, leadership and administrative staffing, and training are all considered organizational moderators. Additionally, the compatibility or fit of a program or intervention with the organization's mission, priorities, and existing practices are also considered organizational context. Community-level moderators may also include the perceived fit of the program with local needs (Durlak & DuPre, 2008).

Research on Dallas County Promise

Promise programs seek to increase access, affordability, and success for students (Callahan et al., 2019). Dallas County Promise is a last-dollar community college program and although current research has shown that last-dollar Promise programs can have a positive impact on postsecondary outcomes, the amount and applicability of the Promise funds may also affect students' enrollment options (Swanson et al., 2020). Tennessee Promise is the last-dollar community college program on which Dallas County Promise program is based (Dallas County Promise Talent Report, 2019). These programs differ in design as all students in the state of Tennessee are eligible for the Tennessee Promise, as opposed to only students at participating high schools in Dallas County for Dallas County Promise. It is important to note that Carruthers and Fox (2016) identified increases in enrollment at two-year colleges, but not at four-year colleges in their evaluation of Knox Achieves, the Knox County last-dollar program which

motivated the passage of the statewide Tennessee Promise program. Although the results were statistically insignificant, all the estimates for the effect of the Knox Achieves on enrollment at four-year institutions were in fact negative. They did however also find that program participants were more likely to graduate from high school and enroll at a postsecondary institution immediately after graduation, with the largest increase among lower-income students (Carruthers & Fox, 2016).

Early findings from a descriptive analysis report conducted by Research for Action (RFA, 2020) indicated that FAFSA completion rates at Promise partner high schools increased after implementation of Dallas County Promise and rates continued to rise the following year as well. According to the National College Attainment Network (NCAN, 2019), there is a strong association between completing the FAFSA and whether a senior enrolls in college in the fall following high school graduation, and this is even more pronounced with students who completed the FAFSA from the lowest socioeconomic quintile who were 127% more likely to be enrolled than their counterparts who did not complete the FAFSA. Additionally, RFA found that the increase in Promise participants at the Dallas College community colleges was at a much higher rate than the overall first-time enrollment, and this increase was Promise participants who were predominantly Hispanic/Latinx and more than half who were Pell Grant recipients. Research for Action (2020) considered the increase in FAFSA completion and increase in enrollment, especially that of Hispanic/Latinx and low-income students in the Dallas community college system to be key measures of college access.

According to Research for Action (2020) most Dallas County Promise students who enrolled at Dallas College in 2018 and 2019 had their tuition covered by federal and state grants. Meaning few (approximately 16%) of the Promise participants actually received money from the

last-dollar scholarship and the average award was between $585 and $708. RFA also reported that the proportion of Black and Hispanic/Latinx students receiving a Promise scholarship decreased from Cohort 1, students entering in Fall 2018, to Cohort 2, students entering Dallas College in Fall 2019. While 6% of Cohort 2 Promise students were White, 16% of Promise scholarships were awarded to White students. They also found that more students in Cohort 2 received larger amounts of Promise scholarship compared to Cohort 1 scholarship amounts.

In terms of success, early findings by Research for Action (2020) revealed that 66.5% of Promise participants persisted into the second year of college, which was slightly higher than the overall 64.4% persistence rate of Dallas College. The persistence rate for Hispanic/Latinx Promise students and the persistence rate of other Promise students (White, Asian, Other, and Unknown), 69.8% and 69.7% respectively, were both higher than the overall persistence rate. However, the persistence rate for Black Promise students was lower at 55%. Research for Action (2020) is planning on continuing their research and recommends more studies on Dallas County Promise to better understand the differences in outcomes across these groups of students, particularly persistence for Black Promise students.

The Present Study

Recent studies have called for additional research on the impacts, efficiency, and equity dimensions of newly implemented Promise program—as well as more clarity for students about costs of attendance and their eligibility for funds—and a review of whether the eligibility requirements help reduce or exacerbate inequities (Rios-Aguilar & Lyke, 2020; Ruiz et al., 2020). The study conducted by House and Dell (2020) on the early outcomes of the Tennessee Promise sought to examine the impact of the program on college enrollment, much in the same way that I examined the early outcomes of the Dallas County Promise program through this

study. Although there are many similarities between the Tennessee Promise program design on which Dallas County Promise was based, eligibility requirements and the population of students served by the Tennessee Promise and the Dallas County Promise are quite different, especially considering the high population of Black and Hispanic/Latinx students in Dallas. House and Dell (2020) also concluded that more research needed to be done on postsecondary outcomes such as completion, student success, and optimal program design. Research for Action continues to conduct research on Dallas County Promise and similarly call for additional studies to be conducted around the perceptions of the program's impact on addressing barriers to college access, affordability, and student success in Dallas County.

These are all important considerations that informed this study, particularly because the Dallas Promise Program is relatively new and current studies have yet to interview stakeholders such as college counselors and administrators who serve as institutional agents who may influence students' understanding and matriculation into college, and counselors being one of the most important of these agents in increasing college enrollment (Stanton-Salazar, 1997; McDonough, 2005). As more states and communities consider implementing Promise programs, assessing and evaluating the Promise programs early and often is a must—paying particular attention to understanding who and who does not benefit from the program and other implications of program design for equity (Perna & Smith, 2020). This study contributes to the current existing gap in literature on last-dollar community college programs and will hopefully spur even further research into the impacts of the Dallas County Promise program as it continues and spreads to more high schools in Dallas.

To help close this gap, this research investigated the characteristics of the Dallas County Promise and its implementation in high schools and examined postsecondary outcomes for graduates from those schools. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the characteristics of the Dallas County Promise Program and how is it being implemented in the target schools?
2. How did college enrollment rates change for graduates from participating Dallas County Promise high schools following the introduction of the program?
    a. To what extent did their choice to enroll at a 2-year or community college change?
    b. To what extent did their choice to enroll at a 4-year college change?
3. How do practitioners perceive the Dallas County Promise Program is impacting or benefitting students?
4. What do practitioners believe can be done to improve program implementation and its outcomes?

By analyzing and reviewing qualitative data collected related to program implementation and impact on college enrollment, in addition to analyzing existing documents on the Dallas County Promise and datasets on the characteristics and postsecondary outcomes of participating high schools, the results of this study will help those involved with Dallas County Promise to reevaluate the program design and implementation as it currently exists and adds to the extant literature on potential impacts of last-dollar community college programs on students' college aspirations, college choice, and postsecondary enrollment. This is important for not only schools, teachers, administrators, and policymakers associated with the Promise program in Dallas, but also those in other regions, districts, and states with existing programs—and even those looking

to implement new Promise programs. A better understanding of last-dollar community college programs for these individuals will allow them to better serve underrepresented students in accessing and succeeding in higher education.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This study sought to understand the Dallas County Promise Program and its implementation in participating high schools, and the potential impact of the program on students and their choice to enroll in college. It examined the extent to which college enrollment in two-year community college and four-year college has changed since the program was introduced, and how college advising staff and administrators understand the implementation at the school level at different high schools and their perceptions and understanding of the impacts of the program on their students. Quantitative analyses examined the changes in college enrollment rates for graduates from participating high schools and whether their choice to attend a community college or a four-year university changed following the program's introduction.

Research Design & Rationale

To achieve the goals for this study, I used a mixed qualitative and quantitative research design, consisting of a combination of exploratory quantitative data analysis, along with document analysis and participant interviews. The first goal was to explore the characteristics of this Promise program and how administrators and staff members implemented and carried out the program within their schools. This was achieved by utilizing document analysis and structured interviews with college advising staff and administrators. The second goal was to investigate the impact of the program on students and college enrollment trends at the participating high schools and was achieved through the interviews and analysis of datasets on high school performance and higher education enrollment rates provided by the state and government education agencies in Texas. By employing both qualitative and quantitative research methods, the study aims to give a voice to the interview participants and their

experiences, while producing a richer and more comprehensive understanding of the implementation and impacts on enrollment.

Site and Population Selection

Dallas County comprises 14 Independent School Districts (ISDs) and according to the most recent 2019-2020 data from the Texas Education Agency, these 14 ISDs serve over 434,000 students in Pre-Kindergarten to 12th grade and approximately 27,500 of those being high school seniors. Dallas County is part of the Region 10 Education Service Center, one of 20 regional service centers established to deliver professional development and a range of other services to an area. Region 10 services 80 ISDs and graduates over 50,000 graduates each year. When the Dallas County Promise program was first introduced in the 2017-2018 academic year, there were 31 participating high schools representing seven of the 14 Independent School Districts (ISDs) in Dallas County and 9,300 high school seniors in Cohort 1. The following year, 2018-2019, Cohort 2 was comprised of 16,500 students from 43 schools across ten districts. That list has since grown to 57 high schools representing 11 ISDs in Dallas and 22,000 high school seniors in Cohort 3 during the 2019-2020 academic year. Although the program has continued, there have been no additional schools added since Cohort 3.

The high schools participating in the Dallas County Promise in Cohorts 1 and 2 were selected as the site for the quantitative analysis portion of this study, while Cohort 3 was initially excluded since it was the most recent cohort with inconsistent data due to the pandemic which occurred in March 2020. However, the population selected for interviews included college advising staff and administrators from high schools participating in the Dallas County Promise in Cohorts 1, 2, and 3. Since these high schools all began participation in the Promise program prior to the pandemic, college advising staff and administrators were able to speak to implementation

of the program and overall impacts of the program on their student prior to and during implementation.

The structured interviews engaged nine staff members working in Dallas County Promise schools: one administrator and eight college counselors/advisors. These staff members represent eight high schools that participate in the Dallas County Promise, five of which have been participating since 2017 as a part of Promise Cohort 1. By interviewing college advising staff from schools in Cohort 1, 2, and 3, I was able to gain insight into some impacts of the program that occurred even prior to implementation at a newly participating school that came from its initial introduction in Dallas County. The interview with an administrator offered a unique perspective on how the design of the program has affected not just students, but also college advising staff and provided insight into the difference between school districts in Dallas that choose to participate in the program and those that do not.

Data Sources

This study relied on three main data sources: publicly available quantitative datasets, document analysis, and structured interviews.

Quantitative Datasets

The study first used datasets from both the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) that reflect school characteristics and college enrollment trends of all Texas high schools during the two years prior to the introduction of the program and specifically for schools in Dallas County Promise Cohorts 1 and 2–2018 and 2019 graduates from participating high schools. The Texas Academic Performance Reports (TAPR) annually pulls together a wide range of information on the performance of students in each school and district in Texas. Performance is shown disaggregated by student groups, including

ethnicity and socioeconomic status and the report also provides extensive information on school programs and student demographics, as well as data points around postsecondary success. THECB also provides an annual report on high school graduates enrolled in a higher education institution in the state of Texas at both the school and district level.

Documents and Other Print Sources

Documents and reports published by the Dallas County Promise Program and its partners reflect the design and key characteristics of the Dallas County Promise program and its implementation in schools. These included the May 2019 Talent Report Executive Summary and the full Dallas County Promise Talent Report, the 2018-2019 Dallas County Promise Policies and Procedures document, THECB's July 2019 60x30TX Progress Report, the August 2020 Dallas County Promise Scholarship Overview and Updates for Students and Parents document, the Dallas County Promise website, in addition to a 14-month study conducted by Research for Action (RFA) in partnership with Commit Partnership, a collective impact organization that includes the Dallas County Promise districts, sponsors, and partners.

Structured Interviews

The third source of data was structured interviews conducted with staff members in Dallas County Promise high schools who work with students on college preparedness. The interviews took place and were recorded via Zoom, with each interview lasting approximately 60 minutes. Interview questions asked participants about their understanding and experiences with the program, its implementation, and the impacts on the students with whom they work. The interview enabled a more comprehensive understanding of the experience of college advising and counseling staff in implementing the program and their understanding of its impact and

influence on the students in their schools. The interviews also allowed participants to voice their suggestions for improvement of the program.

Data Analysis Methods

Exploratory Quantitative Analyses

I utilized the Texas Academic Performance Reports (TAPR) for academic years 2013-2014 through academic year 2019-2020 to conduct descriptive analysis for each Promise cohort in comparison to the Region 10 Education Service Center and the entire state of Texas. Analyses explored student racial/ethnic demographics, socioeconomic status, English learner status, and other basic student-level characteristics. Similarly, to examine the change in enrollment trends, I utilized data on high school graduate enrollments in higher education published by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) from the Fall of 2014 through Fall of 2020. The datasets included a statewide summary of Texas high school graduates enrolling each fall, in addition to high school graduates enrolled in higher education segmented by county, school district, and high school. Analyses were segmented by cohort, region, and state and I compared the proportion of graduates enrolling in a Texas institution of higher education overall, a public or independent four-year institution, and a two-year institution or community college. In addition to observing the change in enrollment rates from the year prior to program implementation to the year after, the enrollment rates dating back to 2014 were also included for each cohort of schools, the region, and state of Texas to identify any possible trends. It should be noted that THECB only provides data on students enrolled in a college in the state of Texas, which still includes most college-bound high school graduates in Texas.

Qualitative Analysis of Documents and Print Sources

I conducted document analysis of publicly available reports and websites to understand the characteristics and features of the Dallas County Promise program, which complement the interviews with college advising staff and administrator on the implementation of the program in participating high schools. Additionally, I used document analysis data to describe the school and student populations served by the program and the goals and design of the program.

Qualitative Analysis of Structured Interviews

I conducted and recorded interviews with the college advising staff members and administrator over Zoom. The recording was then taken and run through Otter.ai, an automated transcription software. To ensure complete accuracy in interview responses, I went back and cleaned up each transcription while listening to the original recording. First, I coded for two categories of responses: background and implementation and program impact and outcomes. After cleaning up the transcripts, additional coding identified key emerging themes and patterns related to a number of sub-categories: resources, challenges, and response; and impact on college enrollment, impact on students, and suggestions for improvement. I coded and organized based on these categories and subcategories and put them into a framework matrix. Direct quotes were also included in the matrix, in addition to summarized findings.

Qualitative Validity

By conducting interviews with both college advising staff and administrators, I intended to gain a better understanding of the Dallas County Promise from multiple perspectives. Although I utilized snowball sampling, after multiple failed attempts to reach administrators from three additional schools, I was unable to secure additional administrators to participate in the study. Instead of discarding the interview and focusing solely on college counseling or

advising staff, I decided to include the voice of this one administrator given their experience and in-depth knowledge and familiarity with the program, its implementation, and impacts.

I also initially sought to focus solely on Cohort 1 since there are more outcome data for that cohort. However, I found that incorporating the perspectives of college advising staff who were at non-participating schools prior, but then had the program introduced as part of Cohort 2 or 3, would give a better understanding of not just the implementation of the program at their schools. Instead, by collecting data from various schools that were a part of different cohorts and implementation years and utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methods, it allowed me to triangulate the data and compare the perspectives of college advising staff to see how program implementation has changed or remained the same with each cohort, and also gain insight into the secondary impact of the program on students even at high schools not participating in the program.

To further enhance the validity of the study, particularly the interviews, I practiced standardized and systematic data collection. The interview protocol linked to predetermined categories of background and implementation and program outcome and impacts. I conducted a pilot interview with an administrator at another Promise program and practiced interviewing, listening, and rapport-building before engaging in the pilot and again before my actual study. Additionally, I utilized the same interview protocol to ensure all participants were asked the same question and had predetermined follow up and probing question to encourage the appropriate amount of detailed response from participants.

Ethical Issues

Participation and confidentiality were essential to data collection, so with the knowledge that school staff had been inundated with additional work and responsibilities due to the

pandemic and it was nearing the end of the academic year, I chose to conduct snowball sampling to obtain interview participants. The initial request was sent to an administrator working with multiple high schools in Dallas, many of which participate in the Dallas County Promise.

The administrator I first contacted was able to connect me with college advising staff, which I believe made it easier to schedule interviews with the counselors and advisors. The study being confidential also allowed participants to feel more comfortable in sharing genuine thoughts and feelings about the Promise program, in addition to their wishes and suggestions for improvement.

Given my own work at an organization that promotes access to four-year universities, when presenting questions I aimed to not signal any preconceptions, preferences, or bias in any direction about the program. When contacting college advising staff and administrators, I made it clear that the goal of this study was to better understand the program, its implementation, and their perception of its impacts. Although I have personal and professional ties to college access organizations and higher education institutions in Texas, I introduced myself as a UCLA graduate student researcher and only revealed my current or past positions if specifically asked after the conclusion of the interview.

I took multiple steps to protect the identities of the participants to ensure their anonymity and I made aware them aware that their participation was entirely voluntary at all stages of the process. Prior to the interviews, each participant was also given a study information sheet including a description of the study and their rights as participants. At the start of each interview, I reminded participants of this again and asked for a verbal agreement that they understood their rights and gave me permission to record their interview on Zoom. To further ensure anonymity and to protect participants' identities, I gave each participant a number in my notes and later

assigned pseudonyms to those numbers for the purpose of discussing findings. Any files containing the actual names of participants were password protected and later destroyed after transcription was completed. I told all participants they would be given the option to review the findings of the study to ensure I presented the information they provided accurately.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

This study used complementary quantitative and qualitative methods to understand how the Dallas County Promise program was implemented in Dallas County high schools and gather initial exploratory evidence of the potential impact of the program on students' enrollment and college choice in Texas higher education institutions. In this chapter, I start by presenting descriptive statistics as context to describe the cohorts of high schools participating in the Dallas County program. Then, I present the findings of analyses organized by the four research questions guiding this dissertation.

Overview of Promise Cohorts

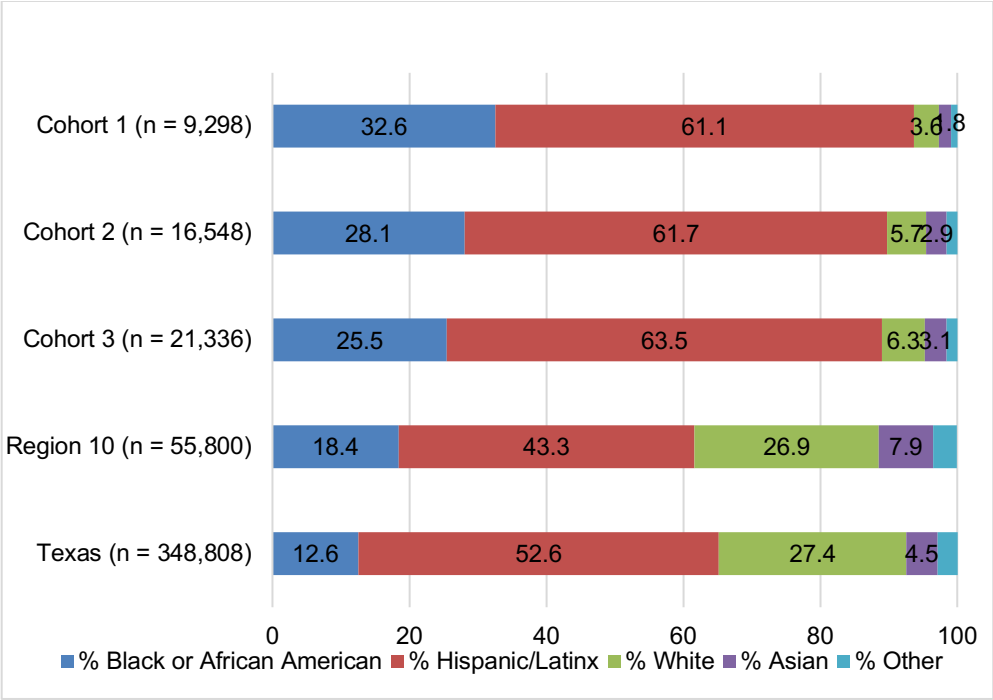
Most Dallas high school students identify as Black/African American or Hispanic/Latinx and many are also economically disadvantaged. The high schools and the Independent School Districts (ISDs) to which they belong that are participating in the Promise cohorts also have more Black/African American and Hispanic/Latinx students, as well as have a higher percentage of economically disadvantaged and Limited English Proficient students compared to the surrounding region and state of Texas.

Cohort 1, the first students eligible to participate in Dallas County Promise in 2017-18 were from 31 participating Dallas high schools identified as having some of the highest poverty rates in the county and the lowest college completion rates as well. As seen in Figure 4.1, the seniors in Cohort 1 of the Dallas County Promise were predominantly Black or African American and Hispanic/Latinx (see Appendix A, for full dataset of demographic information for the 31 Promise schools as a whole and the graduates from academic year 2016-2017, prior to the introduction of the program). The proportions of Black or African American and Hispanic/Latinx high school seniors in Dallas County and Promise Cohort 1 are substantially higher than the

proportions of these same populations in Region 10 and state of Texas overall. Conversely, the proportion of White students in Dallas and Cohort 1 are substantially lower than that of the region and state.

Figure 4.1

Demographics of Promise Cohort Schools During Promise Implementation Year 1(2017-2018)



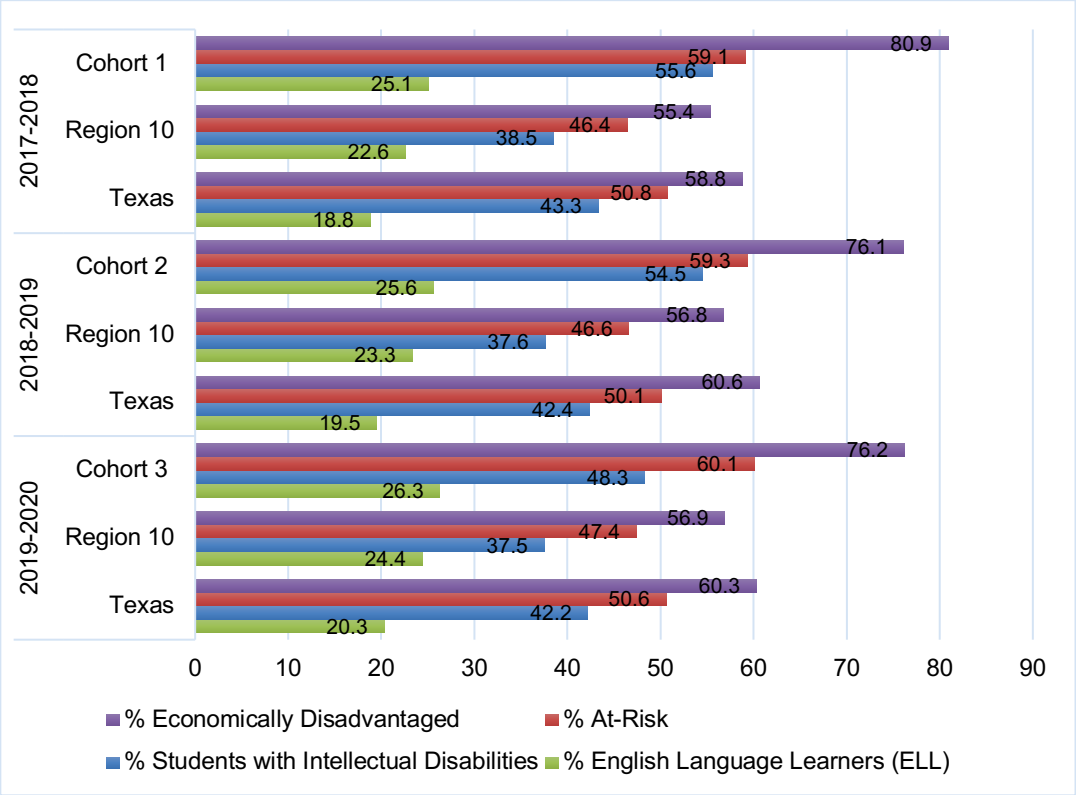
Notes. "Other" consists of people who identify themselves as Native Hawaiian, Native American, Multi-Racial, or people who did not report their racial and ethnic identity. "n" values and percentages for Region 10 and Texas are averages across 2017-2020 as the percentages remained consistent (no change greater than 1.2%) or the same across all racial and ethnic groups. All data retrieved from the Texas Education Agency 2017-2020 Texas Academic Performance Reports (TAPR).

Promise Cohort 2 included an additional 12 schools in academic year 2018-2019 and the following year 2019-2020 there were 14 more high schools participating in the program making up Cohort 3. The senior student population in each cohort remained predominantly Hispanic/Latinx and Black or African American, however, although the number of seniors at participating high schools has more than doubled from Cohort 1 to Cohort 3—from

approximately 9,000 to over 21,000 students—the overall proportion of Black students has decreased with each cohort. Conversely, the other racial and ethnic group proportions have increased slightly with each cohort. This can be explained in part because schools joining the program in later cohorts are schools that have lower poverty rates than those in Cohort 1 and higher college completion rates.

Figure 4.2

Distribution of Students by Socioeconomic and Learning Status in Dallas County Promise Cohort Schools Compared to the Region and State (2017-2020)



Notes. Economically Disadvantaged is the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch or eligible for other public assistance (Data source: TSDS PEIMS 40100 and STAAR). At-Risk is the percentage of students identified as being at risk of dropping out of school as defined by TEC §29.081(d) and (d-1) (Data source: TSDS PEIMS 40100 ᶜStudents with Intellectual Disabilities is the percentage of students with an Intellectual Disability (ID), Learning Disability (LD), Developmental Delay (DD), or Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) (TSDS PEIMS disability codes 06, 08, 12, 13). All data retrieved from the Texas Education Agency and 2017-2020 Texas Academic Performance Reports (TAPR).

Figure 4.2 shows the average proportion of economically disadvantaged students, English Language Learner (ELL) students, at-risk students, and students with intellectual disabilities at each cohort of high schools participating in the Promise by academic year. The high schools taking part in the Dallas County Promise program from Cohorts 1, 2, and 3 have a higher proportion of economically disadvantaged students, ELL students, at-risk students, and students with intellectual disabilities compared to the surrounding region and the state of Texas. Noticeably, the percentage of English Language Learners is steadily increasing from one cohort to the next, and that same trend can be seen in the region and more broadly across the state of Texas. This all further solidifies the necessity of exploring any impacts that a last-dollar Promise program such as the Dallas County Promise may have on both underrepresented minority and low-income students.

Overview of Interview Participants

The structured interviews engaged nine staff members working in Dallas County Promise schools: one administrator and eight college counselors/advisors [hereafter referred to as "counselors"]. The sample of counselors interviewed for this study was broadly representative of the participating high schools from one of the school districts involved with the Dallas Promise, and the administrator interviewed provided a higher level of understanding of the program and filled in gaps for the remaining schools in the district across all cohorts. Table 4.1 presents information around the role, years of experience, and whether the survey participant played a part in implementation of the Promise program at their school. The counselors serve as college advising/counseling staff and represent all three cohorts and a total of eight high schools that participate in the Dallas County Promise. Six of the counselors were directly involved in the implementation of the program in the year their school began participating. Except for the two

counselors not involved with first year Promise implementation at their school, the remaining counselors were all working in Dallas schools prior to the initial introduction of the program during the 2017-2018 academic year, so they were already familiar with their students and the college-going culture of their schools.

Table 4.1

Summary of Interview Participants (n = 9)

Staff Member Name (pseudonym)	Role	Years of Experience	School in Cohort	Involved in Program Implementation
Ms. Bianchi	Administrator	9	1	Yes
Ms. Jenkins	Counselor/Advisor	5	3	Yes
Ms. Young	Counselor/Advisor	2	1	No
Ms. Smith	Counselor/Advisor	4	2	Yes
Ms. Lopez	Counselor/Advisor	4	1	Yes
Ms. Ordaz	Counselor/Advisor	7	1	Yes
Mr. Lewis	Counselor/Advisor	3	3	Yes
Ms. Blythe	Counselor/Advisor	6	1	Yes
Mr. Green	Counselor/Advisor	3	1	No

Research Question #1: Characteristics and Implementation of Dallas County Promise

The first research question sought to explore the characteristics of the Dallas County Promise program, and its implementation at participating high schools. Document analysis of Dallas County Promise documents and reports was performed to explore the characteristics of the Dallas County Promise and structured interviews with the nine participants working in a participating high school were also used to collect qualitative data to supply additional insight into the program and school communities.

Characteristics of Dallas County Promise

Table 4.2 presents basic information gathered through document analysis about Dallas County Promise and the participating high schools in all three cohorts. Dallas County Promise

was introduced to 31 schools during the 2017-2018 academic year, and added 12 schools the following year in 2018-2019, and 14 the year after that, for a total of 57 in 2019-2020. As the program grew to include more high schools, it also included more of the 14 independent school districts (ISDs) in Dallas County, going from seven in Cohort 1 to ten in Cohort 2. By academic year 2019-2020, Cohort 3 included 11 of the 14 ISDs.

Table 4.2

Features of the Dallas County Promise Program for Cohorts 1 – 3 (2017-2020)

Program Characteristics & Features	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3
Academic Year Implemented	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020
Participating School Districts	7	10	11
Participating High Schools	31	43	57
Eligible High School Seniors	9,300	16,500	22,000
Pledged Students	8,600	15,900	20,255
Percent of Eligible Students Signing Pledge	96%	98%	99%
Percent Increase in FAFSA Completion	7	5	4
FAFSA Completion Rate	67%	67%	68%
Participating 4-Year Partners	2	6	10
Partners with additional criteria	1	5	9
Pledge Open Date	October 2, 2017	October 6, 2018	October 1, 2019
Pledge Deadline	January 31, 2018	February 8, 2019	February 7, 2020
Dallas College Deadline	March 15, 2018	February 8, 2019	February 7, 2020
FAFSA/TASFA Deadline	March 15, 2018	March 8, 2019	March 6, 2020
Provides Success Coach/Mentor	Yes	Yes	Yes

Note. All data retrieved from the public record documents published by the Dallas County Promise and Research for Action.

Counselors and the administrator described their responsibilities related to implementation of the Promise program as making sure all seniors completed the three-step process which entailed: 1) Completing the Promise Pledge (an online form requiring personal information and high school enrollment verification), 2) applying to *Dallas College* (one of the seven Dallas community colleges previously known as the Dallas County Community College

District or DCCCD), and 3) filing for financial aid by completing the FAFSA or TASFA. Even though the overall number of eligible students more than doubled from Cohort 1 to Cohort 3, the percentage of students signing the Pledge has steadily increased from 96% in the first year to 99% of students signing the Pledge in Cohort 3, making almost all seniors Promise-eligible.

The last required step in the Promise is for students to apply to one of the seven community colleges that make up Dallas College or another Promise Partner college. These additional Promise Partners are four-year institutions, and the number of participating universities has grown from just Southern Methodist University (SMU) and University of North Texas at Dallas (UNT-Dallas) for students in Cohort 1 to consider applying to for transfer, an additional four universities for Cohort 2, to a total of nine universities for Cohort 3. In addition to SMU and UNT-Dallas, Cohort 3 Promise Partners included Midwestern State University, Prairie View A&M University, Austin College, Texas A&M University-Texarkana, Texas A&M University-Commerce, Texas Women's University, and the historically Black college—Paul Quinn College. Although tuition is also covered at these institutions, Dallas County Promise does not cover the additional fees such as books, room and board, or transportation. Many of the schools also have additional criteria that Promise students must meet to either be admissible, such as GPA requirements, or their families must make under a certain amount of money for them to receive the Promise "scholarship" or they have a very limited number of scholarships for Promise students. Many of these schools have earlier deadlines than the general Promise deadlines as well.

Program Implementation in Cohort 1 Schools

Cohort 1 counselors described the students they worked with in their high school as "predominantly Hispanic," "mainly first generation," and "low-income." One counselor noted

that about 90 percent of their students come from families with incomes below $60,000 per year, while another counselor said that approximately 89% of their students were at the "free or reduced-price threshold, so the whole school got free or reduced price lunch." Prior to the Promise, Cohort 1 counselors said they would introduce the whole college application process, including applying for financial aid through the FAFSA or TASFA, and would make sure students were aware of all their postsecondary options. They spoke about the time it took and some of the challenges they faced working with their students, especially with students who would be the first in their family to attend college, in getting the students to even see higher education as a feasible option. One counselor stated that "a lot of those students are first generation students and also low-income, so speaking about college was something that was difficult at first, but slowly you start engaging students" and that was how they "broke the barrier" to talk about college as a possible option after high school. Cohort 1 counselors noted the work that they had to do was not just with students, but also with their parents and that they worked to encourage high-achieving or high-performing students to consider four-year college options both in Texas and out of state. The counselors shared similar thoughts around encouraging students to consider four-year options for college due to their experiences with former students enrolling in the local community colleges and "getting trapped in an endless cycle" and in looking at data from their schools, they noticed there were students not receiving an associate degree or transferring even after four or six years at the community colleges.

The Cohort 1 counselors recalled the program being introduced to them at a meeting the year prior to its implementation at their schools which included their administration and staff from the Dallas County Promise. Prior to the implementation year, one counselor described being told by her school administration that they, "understand that we don't want community

college to be the first and only option sold to our class" and that for "students who should be going to four-year colleges, it's going to be something in their back pocket, but not something that we're going to push." Another Cohort 1 counselor recalled being told by her school administration that the Dallas County Promise Program was "meant to help as many students as possible complete the FAFSA." However, when asked about their understanding of the intended objectives of the Promise program, each counselor said that it was to increase enrollment in college, but specifically a community college and even more specifically the community colleges that make up Dallas College.

The administrator and counselors from Cohort 1 all stated that the responsibilities of counselors for implementation involved them attending meetings and their responsibilities to carry out the work was to ensure students completed the three-step process of signing the Promise Pledge, completing their FAFSA or TASFA, and applying to a Dallas County community college. Resources and activities for program implementation were similar across all Cohort 1 schools. The Dallas County Promise Program provided speakers to high schools who would speak to the senior class about the Promise and would provide staff to assist counselors with FAFSA programs which worked with students on filling out their FAFSA. Promotional materials such as banners and flyers that outlined the program and included a checklist for students to complete the Promise Pledge were also distributed and displayed at each high school. The administrator shared that Dallas County Promise has a limited staff, so they "rely very heavily on the high school campuses to execute those three steps with students."

Counselors had mixed experiences regarding implementation in their schools with one counselor sharing that the program website was still under construction and administration would refer to the introduction of the program in its first year as "fixing a plane while it's in the air."

This counselor recounted excitement from district and school administration and teachers but shared that the level of excitement from college counselors and college advisors was less because they "had to do all the work" promoting and explaining the program to students and families, which was difficult due to the newness of the program and a lack of buy-in from parents at the point of implementation. Implementation for another Cohort 1 counselor involved parent sessions in both English and Spanish which she believed contributed to parent buy-in and general excitement for the program. The last Cohort 1 counselor also shared confusion from students since she was responsible for promoting the Promise program and working with students on general college and financial aid processes. The counselor mentioned the use of text messaging to students from Dallas County Promise as part of the program and its implementation and shared those students would often get frustrated with the reminder texts because they could not unsubscribe from them, and the students thought the messages were coming from her.

Two Cohort 1 counselors commented on the two four-year university partnerships and how during the first year there were "only a handful." Although both counselors spoke positively of the partnership with UNT-Dallas as a way of encouraging reluctant or hesitant students to consider a four-year university, one counselor noted that SMU had earlier deadlines and academic requirements to even transfer, which caused confusion for students thinking they could go to a Dallas community college "to get their basics done and then transfer to SMU" but ultimately would not be able to transfer.

Along with implementation of the program came a method of progress tracking for Promise Pledges submitted and FAFSA completion for each campus. All Cohort 1 counselors already spent time working with students on financial aid, so they did not find that to be an additional burden or responsibility. However, all Cohort 1 counselors noted a shift in

administration's focus from overall college preparation to Promise Pledge completion. They also expressed a sense of added pressure from their principals to get the steps completed as soon as possible, which shifted their work as well. One counselor stated, "we had monthly goals and a lot of meetings to discuss how best we could meet these goals, so my focus started shifting over to that to make sure our students were able to finish their Dallas County Promise." They also noted that the change in FAFSA opening on October 1 rather than January 1 that began the year prior to Promise implementation during the 2016-2017 academic, allowed for FAFSA completion to be emphasized even earlier than in the past and that added to the pressure experienced by counselors since that was a key part of Promise progress tracking for the Cohort 1 schools.

Program Implementation in Cohort 2 Schools

The counselor involved with Promise implementation for Cohort 2, shared that her school had a high percentage of Hispanic/Latinx students, but was one of the "more economically diverse high schools" within the district. The school had approximately 70 percent low SES students, a "bigger group of middle-class students and families, and then a small slice of wealthier families and students." Although it was the first year being implemented at the school, the counselor shared that "a lot of students and families had heard they could go to Dallas College for free" since the program had already been introduced in other Dallas high schools the year before.

Implementation at the Cohort 2 school included a session hosted at the school at the beginning of the school year for seniors and distribution and posting of promotional and marketing materials such as posters and flyers. In addition to the session hosted at the high school, sessions were held at Dallas College and four-year partner colleges, such UNT-Dallas, in which students and parents could go and fill out all the necessary forms. The counselor also

shared that administration and counselors met with Dallas County Promise representatives during the previous academic year and learned about the program and the understanding that the three-step process would be handled by the college counseling and advising staff. That was the first of recurring quarterly meetings that occurred during implementation and included a Promise liaison who was assigned to four Promise high schools. According to the Cohort 2 counselor, the meetings entailed discussions around action plans to reach Pledge and FAFSA numbers and updates on implementation and district metrics. She felt that the expectation for her with the Promise program was to inform students, have them complete the three-step process, and "basically get those percentages up."

The Cohort 2 counselor felt that the reaction from students and families to the implementation of the program at their school was mixed, from "initial glowing responses to free college" to "balking at the thought of being required" to complete the Promise steps, but believes this is in part due to the student population being so economically diverse. The goal of the district and school principal was to have 100% of students complete the Promise Pledge, so the counselor's goal also had to align, and she understood that there was "pressure on school administration to just get the numbers." The counselor also still felt that her job extended passed the Promise numbers and expressed that explaining and having students complete the Promise Pledge took "time and a lot of effort on the part of college advisors" which is time that could have been used to make students aware of other opportunities that could be available to them.

Program Implementation in Cohort 3 Schools

The two Cohort 3 counselors described students at their schools as high performing or high achieving that are either "predominantly Black and Hispanic" or "low income and majority Pell eligible students." One counselor recalled Promise being a "campus-wide conversation right

before it happened," but also said her students were already aware and asking questions as underclassmen. The other Cohort 3 counselor noted the wide exposure to the program for students and families even prior to implementation at his school due to advertisements on Spanish-language television and even Dallas College and Promise Program infographics on public transit buses and trains.

Implementation at both Cohort 3 schools involved a Dallas County Promise representative talking with the seniors at the beginning of the school year. However, Cohort 3 counselors emphasized that implementation at their schools mostly consisted of being given posters, brochures, or flyers for them to distribute to their students and around their campuses. Other than that, they both recall attending meetings with a Dallas County representative either at their school or another school site.

Dallas County Promise at Cohort 3 schools was well received by students and families, with one counselor saying, "they thought it was the greatest thing" and the other saying even his students that "academically outperformed [Promise] partner schools" would inquire about those schools and he felt they were "purely interested in them because they heard they could go there for free." Prior to the Promise, Cohort 3 counselors saw their goal as counselors and advisors was to help their students find four-year colleges that were affordable for them and that would support them as college students. One counselor expressed that the "first semester of senior year was an important time for students" wanting to explore and apply to an affordable four-year university, and both believed that the Dallas Promise was "in competition" with what they were trying to do and "became more of a priority just because the schools were being judged against other schools within the district and even outside the district." The sharing out of data to administration at the district and school level created competition between schools which the

counselors believed made Promise a larger priority and that once students completed the Promise Pledge that, "that was all they wanted to do," which made it harder on counselors to push students to consider and apply to other options, specifically ones that might be better for them.

Similarities and Differences between Promise Cohort Characteristics and Implementation

Implementation across all Promise cohorts involved promotional materials and marketing that was not just at the schools, but also in the Dallas community and targeted both students and parents in English and Spanish. There were also meetings held by the Dallas County Promise program in which administration and counselors were expected to attend. Although implementation operated similarly across Promise cohorts, there were slight differences across cohorts and likely even between schools within those cohorts.

For Cohort 1 schools, most events and programs for students and families were held on the high school campuses, with Dallas County Promise staff coming into the schools. With Cohorts 2 and 3, there were additional programs held at Dallas College and at Promise Partner campuses, and the schools would also send representatives to carry out various programs on high school campuses. With the addition of more four-year Promise Partner schools, the Cohort 2 counselor mentioned college-going messaging at meetings had changed to be more inclusive of those options.

Cohort 3 counselors spoke the least about implementation, but they explained that Dallas County Promise was already very prevalent in their schools and the Dallas community by the time it was implemented. The counselors felt that they were "the promoters of it" and they knew their responsibilities were to explain the Promise, make sure the students complete the steps, and to use and distribute the promotional materials that were dropped off.

The Promise has become a central part of Dallas County, with 11 of the 14 school districts participating and includes 57 schools that serve over 22,000 seniors. The Cohort 1 schools had some of the lowest college going-rates and the highest proportion of Black and Hispanic/Latinx students, in addition to economically disadvantaged students. Although Dallas is predominantly Hispanic/Latinx and Black, as the program continues to expand, each new cohort of schools will likely have slightly lower percentages of these populations than the cohort prior. Additionally, if the program expands to include more four-year partners, this may also change the incoming cohorts as more affluent districts and schools decide to participate.

Research Question #2: Change in College Enrollment Rates

The second research question looks at college enrollment at high schools participating in Dallas County Promise and to what extent their high school graduate enrollment in a Texas institution of higher education, both two-year and four-year, has changed after the program was implemented. Table 4.3 shows the overall enrollment of high school graduates in a Texas higher education institution from Fall 2014 to Fall 2020 for Cohort 1, Cohort 2, Cohort 3 and for the region and state.

Table 4.3

High School Graduate Enrollment in Texas Higher Education Institutions (2014 -2020)

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Cohort 1	45%	46%	45%	46%	53%	52%	36%
Cohort 2	52%	52%	50%	51%	51%	59%	43%
Cohort 3	53%	49%	49%	49%	49%	45%	40%
Region 10	51%	50%	48%	48%	49%	50%	41%
State	51%	51%	50%	50%	50%	49%	42%

Note. All data retrieved from the Texas Education Agency and Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

Change in College Enrollments for Promise Cohort 1 (2017-2018)

Looking back at college enrollment trends dating back to 2014, Table 4.3 shows that prior to the introduction of the Promise program at the 31 Cohort 1 schools, the proportion of graduates from those schools enrolling in higher education was consistently lower compared to the proportion of graduates from Region 10 enrolling in higher education and lower than the proportion of graduates enrolling in higher education statewide. However, during the first year of Promise implementation in 2017-2018, the percentage of graduates from Cohort 1 schools enrolling in college increased substantially from 46% to 53%, with proportions surpassing both the region and state at 49% and 50%, respectively.

From Fall 2017 to Fall 2018—the first year Dallas Promise was implemented—the 31 Cohort 1 schools participating in the Promise saw an increase of 7% of their high school graduates pursuing higher education at either a two-year or four-year institution in Texas. When compared to the surrounding region (Region 10), the overall enrollment in a Texas Higher Education institution increased only slightly by 1% and remained the same in the state of Texas. Again, Table 4.3 shows how in the four years leading up to the implementation of the Promise, the percentage of graduates pursuing higher education at those 31 schools had lagged behind that of the region and state but remained higher in 2018 and the following year as well.

Table 4.4 shows the distribution of Cohort 1 graduates pursuing higher education that enrolled in either a two-year or a four-year college the fall after graduation. Cohort 1 schools had slightly higher proportions of students enrolling in community college compared to the region and state, but from 2014 to 2017, the percentage of graduates from Cohort 1 schools attending a four-year university had steadily been increasing, while the percentage attending a two-year college decreased. In Fall 2014, 46% of graduates from Cohort 1 schools pursuing higher

education in Texas were enrolling in a four-year university and 54% at a two-year. By Fall 2017, 52% were enrolled in a four-year and 48% were enrolled at a two-year college in Texas.

Leading up to the introduction of the Promise program at Cohort 1 schools, the proportion of graduates who pursued higher education and were enrolling in community colleges across Region 10 and Texas remained fairly consistent with almost an even split of students enrolling in community colleges and students enrolling in a four-year college or university. In Fall 2017, prior to Promise implementation, the proportions of students enrolling in community colleges for the Cohort 1 schools were almost equal to that of the region and state at 48 percent. However, in the fall following the Promise implementation year of 2017-2018, the proportion of graduates pursuing higher education from Cohort 1 schools choosing to enroll in a community college increased substantially to 63%, surpassing the proportion of graduates attending a community college for both the region and state, at 52% and 49%, respectively.

Table 4.4

Distribution of Cohort 1 Graduates Enrolling in Texas Higher Education Institutions (2014 - 2020)

	2014		2015		2016		2017		2018		2019		2020	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Two-Year	2,194	54	2,108	53	1,951	50	1,939	48	3,052	63	3,048	62	1,779	52
Four-Year	1,848	46	1,845	47	1,928	50	2,065	52	1,789	37	1,836	38	1,652	48
Total Enrolled	4,042		3,953		3,879		4,004		4,841		4,884		3,431	

Note. All data retrieved from the Texas Education Agency and Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

Table 4.4 shows the change in overall enrollment in college, and distribution of two-year and four-year enrollment for students in Cohort 1. Prior to Promise implementation, schools in Cohort 1 were beginning to experience slightly higher proportions of graduates enrolling in a college from Fall 2016 to Fall 2017, with more than half (52%) of graduates pursuing higher

education enrolled in four-year colleges. After implementation, Cohort 1 schools saw a higher number and percentage of their graduates enroll in college overall, with the increase being attributed to the substantial increase of students enrolling in community college. The most notable trend is that following Promise implementation, the proportions of Cohort 1 students who pursued higher education enrolling in community college increased from 48% to 63%, while the decrease in four-year enrollment was inversely proportional from 52% to 37%. One Cohort 1 counselor noted that from one year to the next, "the enrollment numbers literally switched from the majority enrolling in four-year to the majority enrolling in a two-year" and that the change "was so dramatic." Table 4.4 shows the actual number of students which further illustrates the increase in students pursuing higher education, particularly two-year colleges. Cohort 1 schools had an overall increase of over a thousand graduates enrolling in community college from Fall 2017 to Fall 2018 and a decrease of just under 300 students enrolling in a four-year institution. This explains the "dramatic change" experienced by Cohort 1 counselors and the substantial increase in graduates from Cohort 1 schools enrolling in college.

Other Cohort 1 counselors attributed the change in proportions and increase in community college enrollment to parent involvement, with one noting parents being "happy because their kids were able to go to college and stay home" and students who could have gone to a four-year institution deciding to attend community college in Dallas because they were "listening to their parents" and Dallas County Promise "just made it easier." Another Cohort 1 counselor commented that since the Promise offered "free tuition" that students "who maybe had to pay $4,000 total including room and board at UT-Dallas, Midwestern State, or another four-year school" would choose to go to community college in Dallas because their parents would fixate on "free college." Even when the counselor explained that "$4,000 might be a better deal

because it includes tuition, the dorm room, the meals, everything. 'Free' is just tuition, it doesn't include anything else," parents and students would choose the community college option. The counselor explained that messaging of "free college" was "advertised on TV and on billboards" and parents thought, "free, free, free, everything's free. Why would we be dumb and not choose free?"

Change in Enrollment for Promise Cohort 2 (2018-2019)

Table 4.5 presents the change and distribution in enrollments for Cohort 2, the 12 additional high schools that implemented the Promise in the 2018-2019 school year. The proportion of graduates at these high schools enrolling in either a two-year or four-year college in Texas increased by 8% overall from 2018 to 2019, with the increase again being attributed to an increase in students enrolling in community college.

Table 4.5

Distribution of Cohort 2 Graduates Enrolling in Texas Higher Education Institutions (2014 - 2020)

	2014		2015		2016		2017		2018		2019		2020	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Two-Year	1,918	59	1,949	59	1,806	56	1,861	56	1,929	58	2,930	71	1,921	64
Four-Year	1,321	41	1,359	41	1,403	44	1,490	44	1,416	42	1,196	29	1,068	36
Total Enrolled	3,239		3,308		3,209		3,351		3,345		4,126		2,989	

Note. All data retrieved from the Texas Education Agency and Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

While the proportion of Cohort 2 graduates enrolling in a four-year college decreased by 13% from Fall 2018 to Fall 2019, the actual change of roughly 220 students is illustrated in Table 4.5. The fall after Promise implementation, Cohort 2 schools overall had approximately 1,000 more graduates enrolling in community college compared to the fall prior. This

contributed to the percentage increase of students pursuing higher education in those schools and the inversely proportional change in distribution of Cohort 2 students pursuing higher education enrolling in a two-year community college compared to those enrolling in a four-year institution in Texas.

The Cohort 2 counselor found that the Promise increased the number of students enrolling in community college from their school and believed that the program has "gotten more students to think about enrolling in college" more broadly, but also that "more students that were eligible to go to a four-year college have opted to go to community college instead." They also attributed this to the Dallas County Promise being "great at marketing," which was actually helpful for students "who intended to get some sort of certificate or go into a more vocational based training such as HVAC or welding," since the Promise "brought more attention to the different kinds of programs offered at Dallas College." Although the counselor recognized the increase in higher education enrollment as a positive, they expressed concern as they were unaware of "any huge shift in students actually graduating from community colleges" and believes more can be done "to make sure kids graduate."

Change in Enrollment for Promise Cohort 3 (2019-2020)

With the increase of graduates enrolling in higher education from Cohorts 1 and 2, a similar phenomenon could be expected with Cohort 3 as the number of participating high schools grew by another 14 to a total of 57 high schools. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and stay-at-home orders that went into effect in March 2020, higher education enrollments across the country were heavily impacted. Table 4.6 shows that in Fall 2020, the year after Promise implementation and during the pandemic, Cohort 3 schools overall had approximately 320 less graduates enrolled in higher education overall compared to the fall prior. The proportion of

Cohort 3 graduates enrolled in a four-year college decreased by 6% from Fall 2019 to Fall 2020 and the proportion enrolled in a two-year increased by 6%. The actual change in can be seen in Table 4.6, with roughly 60 less students enrolled in a two-year and 260 less enrolled in a four-year in Fall 2020 compared to Fall 2019.

Table 4.6

Distribution of Cohort 3 Graduates Enrolling in Texas Higher Education Institutions (2014 - 2020)

	2014		2015		2016		2017		2018		2019		2020	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Two-Year	1,332	55	1,280	55	1,255	55	1,170	51	1,310	55	1,262	54	1,204	60
Four-Year	1,069	45	1,046	45	1,015	45	1,105	49	1,078	45	1,058	46	799	40
Total Enrolled	2,401		2,326		2,270		2,275		2,388		2,320		2,003	

Note. All data retrieved from the Texas Education Agency and Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

During the interviews, the administrator and almost every counselor across all cohorts specifically mentioned the pandemic and the impact it played on college enrollment. Table 4.3 shows that in Fall 2020, all cohorts, the region, and the state of Texas overall experienced a decrease in the percentage of their high school graduates enrolling in higher education institutions in the state, likely due to the pandemic. It should be noted that the Cohort 3 high schools had the smallest overall decrease (5 %) among the three Promise cohorts, and the decrease in proportion of students pursuing higher education in Texas was even lower than that of the region and state. Interestingly, the percentage of students from Cohort 3 schools enrolling in a higher education institution in Texas had been steadily declining, particularly since the introduction of the Dallas Promise Program in 2017. This trend is opposite that of the other Promise cohorts, however, the administrator and Cohort 3 counselors did not find it concerning. Cohort 3 schools had more "really high achieving students" and "most of them wanting to go to

a four-year school." This meant that more students from Cohort 3 schools were enrolling in four-year institutions outside of Texas, which is not tracked in higher education enrollment data provided by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board or the Texas Education Agency.

Research Question #3: Practitioners' Perceptions of Program Impact

The third research question seeks to understand the perceptions that counselors and administrators have about the impacts and benefits of the Dallas County Promise for their students. In this section, I summarize the findings from the nine interviews held with counselors, advisors, and administration working directly in Promise schools, across Cohorts 1, 2, and 3. Analysis of the interview data revealed three ways in which the program potentially impacts students. First, the program creates access to higher education by directly providing financial support as a "last-dollar tuition scholarship" for students who either do not qualify for federal financial aid due to their citizenship status or for students whose families were considered "middle-income" and made above the Pell eligibility bracket. Second, the Promise created discussion around attending college. Third, it influenced students' decision to pursue higher education and their college choice.

Financial Impact on Students

There was one population of students that multiple counselors from both Cohort 1 and 3, in addition to the administrator felt benefitted most from the Promise and that was undocumented students. Undocumented students are unable to file the FAFSA to received federal financial aid, but the counselors said that Dallas County Promise allowed undocumented students to file the TASFA and still receive state funds which could also cover community college. However, one counselor noted that state grants can run out and even with state grants from filing the TASFA that there were also "undocumented students whose parents might not be present or really hard to

figure out how much they're making, or if they're migrant workers, where they are" and these students could benefit from the money provided by the Promise. The administrator added that there are some high schools in Texas and the area that have high undocumented student populations and that "they would very much benefit from some of these programs because they don't qualify for a lot of state aid."

Counselors also described challenges they faced and the ways in which these same undocumented students who could benefit from the Promise had their documents processed at a much slower rate that "lagged terribly behind how quickly they processed forms for U.S. citizens." Another counselor explained the challenges in getting both undocumented students and their families to trust them and provide tax or earning documents and this required additional time and care, that was not always considered with the pressures of administration tracking Promise Pledges.

The other group of students that counselors mentioned were their students who were not eligible for the Pell Grant, which was typically a small percentage of students across each Promise cohort school. One counselor remarked that Promise could be a great option even for students from high-income families, but they also acknowledged that the wealthier families were usually not interested and thought "maybe this could be good for some people," but not them or their children. Most counselors who spoke about the group of students who benefit from the financial support provided by Promise noted that these students would be those that were "just a little above the threshold, but still needed that [financial] help to make sure that college was accessible," since the EFC amount from the FAFSA is "not a perfect formula…to gauge what position a family is [in] financially to help their student." Another counselor admitted that

finding “an affordable option for a just slightly middle and lower middle-income family is really hard,” and that is a “really tough bracket to be in.”

The administrator echoed that sentiment and recounted a student who was “on the borderline of being Pell eligible, but Texas public schools had no money for him even with a really high SAT score.” The administrator and counselors did not necessarily believe that the students who were right at the threshold of Pell were “benefitting” from the Promise by enrolling in community college. One Cohort 1 counselor expressed concern around retention of those students at community colleges and both the administrator and another Cohort 1 counselor wished those students had “more options” from which to choose.

Increased Exposure and Engagement

Although most counselors expressed frustration with some misconceptions that the Promise marketing sometimes created, some counselors also noticed more engagement from their students and families. One of the counselors who worked at a Cohort 1 school after it was already implemented noticed that in the last two years the Promise had “definitely created more discussion…getting students and families engaged” and there was “a good size group that’s been engaged that weren’t before.” While another Cohort 1 counselor recounted her experience during the first implementation year of Promise of working with students who “didn’t want to do it” because they said they would just “go work with their dad or do something else.”

Some counselors found that the Promise program provided a space and opportunity for them to have the initial conversation about college more easily and this was particularly useful for another group of students that counselors identified as those that might benefit most from the Promise, students pursuing a trade or certification. A Cohort 1 counselor felt that the Promise was beneficial for having conversations around college with many of the students at their school

that were already working full-time for their uncle or another family member and "had shifted away from their academic responsibilities, doing the bare minimum to graduate." The counselor shared that these students typically had lower GPAs and expressed no interest in attending even a community college because they thought that community college was a route for students wanting to transfer later to a four-year university. However, the counselor would let the students know that they could use the Promise to take classes at a Dallas community college and "if you become a certified auto technician or diesel mechanic, you'll have more opportunities."

The counselor from a Cohort 2 school also mentioned that for students interested in pursuing a certificate or vocational training, that the Dallas Promise has "given that route a bit more of a sheen." While the administrator acknowledged that there are certifications programs through Dallas College that allow students to become certified technicians and be paid well, that there needs to be "more knowledge about how these programs work" as they have witnessed students dropping out of Dallas community college because "although they wanted to go into AutoTech or HVAC, they're being put on an associate's degree track, which isn't what they want to do, it doesn't align with what their goals are." In addition to clarity on the program and actual outcomes, a desire for more transparency in messaging was echoed by the administrator and counselors.

Impact on Opportunities and College Choice

All counselors across every Promise cohort and the administrator mentioned the impact of the Dallas County Promise marketing and their messaging promoting "free college." While some Cohort 1 counselors found a challenge in garnering buy-in from students and families during the first year of the Promise, Cohort 2 and Cohort 3 counselors found that the messaging around the program had spread in their schools and the community even before implementation

in their schools. Even with buy-in and excitement from students and families, counselors from every cohort expressed a desire for more transparency or honesty in the Promise marketing and "free college" messaging. This desire stems from counselors wanting to ensure that their students have as many opportunities and options as possible for college. Most counselors felt there were many times that the Promise reduced or limited opportunities for their students due to the focus of administration on Promise Pledge completion and focus on "free community college" in Promise messaging that students and parents embraced, rather than messaging around exploring and pursuing affordable both two- and four-year college options.

Both administrator and counselors from all Promise cohorts voiced concern around the messaging of the Promise as a "scholarship" because most of their students were low-income and their tuition at community college would be covered by their Pell Grant. One Cohort 1 counselor mentioned they could "count how many students had an EFC that was high enough to where they would have gotten any Promise dollars, but it was fewer than ten on a campus of 300 seniors, so it was really not a substantial number." Overall, most also wished that if it were a true scholarship that the money could be used not just for Dallas College and Promise partners, but instead for any college in Texas or out of state.

Although many counselors noted that the increase in four-year partner schools has been beneficial in bringing the conversation of four-year college options to their students and families, counselors across every cohort spoke about some challenges they have experienced talking to many students and families about considering options outside of Dallas College and Promise Partner Schools due to their fixation on the idea of free college. A Cohort 1 counselor recounted that one of her top 10 students opted to just "take the Dallas Promise and ended up going to a community college, but she had to balance working and going to community college… working

was always a higher priority," and spoke on other students with "great potential" getting "stuck in that cycle." A Cohort 3 counselor expressed the challenges that came from parents of their high-achieving students, particularly a female student, whose parents discouraged her from applying to opportunities outside of the Promise because the Promise was "guaranteed and free." Another Cohort 1 counselor recounted experiences with parents wanting their children to stay in Dallas because it's "free" and "college is the same…going to college is going to college." The counselor also noted that many of their Hispanic students, especially female students, felt they "couldn't really go against them" limiting their opportunities to pursue four-year institutions even outside of the state or even outside of Dallas.

Even though many students and parents believe that the Promise is "free college," counselors from each Promise cohort mentioned having to work to educate students and families on what this actually meant and had to work to convince students to even apply to other options to be able to show them a financial aid package from four-year schools that would actually be more affordable than just "free tuition, which is just their own Pell grant from the government." The administrator also voiced:

> I think that people really fail to understand that tuition is a small part of being a college student. Free tuition does not make college affordable. It doesn't allow students to persist, particularly when they're living at home and still facing the same challenges financially that they were facing in high school. And in fact, I would argue that they have even more challenges because their parents expect that they can help out more either with siblings or work more. So, I have not seen it do anything except siphon off students who should be going to affordable four-year colleges, and it has not done the other side of getting them through with a credential either.

Counselors in Cohorts 1, 2, and 3 consistently mentioned the importance of providing options and exposing their students to more opportunities. One counselor in Cohort 1 shared they were a first-generation college student and that they see themselves in a lot of their students and understand that it takes a lot of time to help parents understand the process and to educate them that "not every college is equal." Another Cohort 3 counselor shared that he grew up in Dallas and was from the community, and on the Promise he remarked that he "felt uncomfortable with how it is portrayed" and felt it was targeting a vulnerable population of students and parents. Although the counselor did not think the Promise and Dallas College "is purposefully pushing out misinformation," he believed "they benefit from" the money coming in from students with Pell Grants and Texas grants enrolling in their schools.

Research Question #4: Practitioners' Perceptions of Implementation and Outcomes

The last research question looks at the high school counselors and administrator's perceptions about ways to improve the Promise program implementation, as well as its effectiveness (i.e. its outcomes). Analysis of the interview data revealed two main common threads across all cohorts. First, the counselors and administrator felt there were key aspects of the program design and implementation that should be addressed to better support students and their postsecondary success. Second, counselors and the administrator desired more transparency regarding program data and messaging, specifically the prominent messaging of "free college" onto which students and their families had latched.

Program Design and Implementation

Overall, Cohort 1 counselors and the administrator were able to offer the most input and thoughts on possible improvements to the program. Collectively, this group has the most experience and interactions with students who have gone on to become Promise Scholars, which

influenced their perceptions about necessary improvements for both design and implementation. The administrator and one of the counselors had familiarity with other Promise programs and mentioned their design being better than the last dollar approach of the Dallas County Promise. The counselor suggested that the Dallas County Promise should be like other Promise programs and "don't make them go to community college first," but rather allow students to receive the same amount of money at any college, both two- and four-year, and even schools located out of the state. The administrator echoed those thoughts and specifically mentioned the success seen with the Hartford Promise in Connecticut which allows students to attend four-year universities and receive up to $5,000. The administrator commented that there are "lessons that we can learn from other programs that are going above and beyond to ensure that students are actually able to earn that postsecondary credential."

Another aspect of the program design and implementation mentioned by all Cohort 1 counselors and the administrator was a better method of assessing "student success" other than the tracking of completed pledges by high school. Some counselors referred to it as a "shame sheet" which was sent out weekly to district and school administration, sharing publicly each school's pledge completion rates that week or month. After these started being sent out, one counselor mentioned:

> The number one focus was how quickly you can get your pledges, and how quickly can you get 100%. That became kind of the only thing that the district was tracking. They used to track for college applications, but then all of a sudden, they were just tracking Dallas County promise pledge numbers and sending those out to principals.

The counselors and administrator felt this focus on pledge completion took time away from true college and career advising, with one even noting "it was by design" so that the Dallas Promise was not a backup option, but instead the only option for students.

The counselors and the administrator acknowledged that the Promise program could actually be a good option for some students, but there are improvements that are necessary, particularly around support and resources provided to Promise students attending one of the seven community colleges collectively known as *Dallas College*. One counselor noted that during the first year of the Promise program, the counselors were told that students would be supported by success coaches, but she "didn't know *how* students were going to be supported within the community colleges… in terms of support staff on the actual campuses that are specifically dedicated to work with Promise students." Not knowing what academic supports and resources would be provided to students caused concern for counselors wanting to do what was best for their students. She also mentioned feeling "a mixture of emotions" knowing the low retention and graduation rates of Dallas College and that many of her students were first-generation college students and would likely need more support to persist in college. The administrator noted that "a lot of students have enrolled in this program and have not persisted successfully…in some cases over 60%." Although the design of the program included success coaches, the administrator and counselors shared experiences of students coming to them with questions after not receiving adequate support from the success coaches or community college staff. They believed that there needed to be more community college staff dedicated to support Promise students once they were in college and that resource centers should have been created specifically for Promise students and with the population of Dallas County students in mind. The Promise program "heavily offered resources in high school and should offer the same resources

on campus for the students at the college" and the design should "be built out with true first-generation college support on the community college campus." Dallas County has a high population of low-income students and Black and Hispanic/Latinx students, many of whom are the first to go to college. The counselors believed the resources and support systems that were a part of the original program design were not sufficient for the influx of students or tailored to the unique needs of those students, which has led to low persistence for students and is ultimately not conducive to the goals of the program, nor the aspirations counselors and administration have for their students.

A few counselors and the administrator also mentioned the need for more staff and print resources, specifically for academic advising for degree completion and transfer pathways, and for financial counseling. One counselor spoke about students being told they can transfer to four-year universities, but "they're not being given anything that shows them how to actually make that pathway work." The counselor mentioned that "the onus is on the student to make sure the credits transfer" and also receiving texts from her former students "about the [long] lines to wait for an advisor or the lines to get into the financial aid office." Even though Dallas College increased their enrollment numbers, the counselor commented that Dallas College "did not scale up hiring to help with that." Another counselor spoke about "not really seeing a lot of [students] transfer out like the program said it would," while the administrator also spoke on the need for transfer pathway resources and financial counseling using an example student from Cohort 1 who was looking to transfer. The student had been in community college for three years and amassed a significant amount of debt. On this student the administrator said:

> …looking how they were going to be able to successfully get those students out of the system on time, it was just an impossible task. 90 credit hours and $25,000 in debt, when

> you're looking at transferring with that, it's impossible. I can't figure it out because essentially, the cost of attendance for our community college is $1,700. So how are our students ending up in this amount of debt? And how come we're not doing more financial counseling and how come we're not investigating and making sure that this isn't what happens to students?

Counselors and administration were clear that they wanted their Promise students to succeed in community college, whether they wanted to pursue a certificate or transfer to a four-year university. They believed that for this to happen, the Dallas County Promise must provide more support and adequate resources designed with the population of Dallas students in mind.

The sample included only one counselor in a Cohort 2 school. This counselor also suggested more resources and support to improve the program. While they noted that their students had positive interactions using the texting feature made available to communicate with the success coaches, there were more "mixed messages as far as campus staff" and students being "disappointed by the advising they get once they get to Dallas College." The counselor recounted:

> I had one student two years ago who was participating in the Promise, but somehow his advisor on the Dallas College campus had not signed him up for a full-time course load and so he couldn't receive financial aid that fall semester. How does that happen?

This counselor also mentioned a need for more resources for academic advising and transfer pathways, and "education about how to succeed at Dallas College." Although she had witnessed some of her students succeed at Dallas College, she mentioned having also seen the success data on Dallas College and believes providing more resources would help improve student success and retention.

Finally, the two counselors in Cohort 3 schools had fewer interactions with Promise Scholars from their schools since the program was implemented more recently, but still shared thoughts and suggestions for program design and implementation improvement. One counselor noted that her students who started at Dallas College, "are the ones who come back to me needing help, but my students who went out of state or went to a four-year school, I don't hear from them." This counselor also mentioned that she had former students reaching out to her asking about course selection because they were hoping to transfer, but "they were having trouble figuring out what classes are going to transfer over" and that she was unaware of any of her students' interactions with success coaches. Rather than more staff resources to support Promise students at Dallas College, the counselor thought it preferable to have a dedicated Dallas County Promise staff member to handle the responsibility of having students complete the pledge, instead of counselors because "everyone on campus have enough on their plate without having to add this onto it." She also suggested that the process could be simplified by auto-enrolling students so all they must do is "the application to the school and their financial aid" and reducing the number of deadlines to a singular deadline, rather than different ones being in place for forms and various partner schools. By simplifying the process and having a dedicated Dallas County Promise staff member to oversee it, counselors would have more time to work with students in exploring four-year colleges and other options outside of the Promise. The administrator mentioned "the lack of resources and the lack of support to do quality college advising inhibits the conversation about fit and match." Both Cohort 3 counselors agreed that first semester of senior year was an important time for students hoping to pursue college and improvements to the program design and process could reduce the time and stress associated

with Dallas County Promise, allowing counselors the time and energy to better serve their students by exploring more postsecondary options.

Data and Messaging Transparency

There was a desire for transparency from counselors across every cohort, in addition to the administrator. One call for transparency is around the data on student retention and success at Dallas College and the other was more transparency in the messaging of "free college" and referring to it as a "scholarship." Although counselors across every cohort acknowledged that community college was not a "bad option," they did mention challenges that their students faced as the first in their families to go to college or as low-income students who would have to prioritize work even while attending the community college. A counselor from a Cohort 1 school mentioned a former student who is in their third year at Dallas College but has not yet received a degree or certificate. The counselor said, "I don't see any full successes yet" but would like the Promise administrators to provide data on her students to ensure she "made the right decision in advocating for the Promise program" to her students. Another counselor from a Cohort 1 high school mentioned:

> The fact that the graduation rates [at Dallas College] are in almost single digits in a lot of scenarios tells me that I need to do my best for a student if they're eligible to go to a four-year because that's going to be the best bet in terms of them potentially graduating in four years.

From seeing the most current data on student success at Dallas College and their experiences with their students who were enrolled at Dallas College, many counselors felt conflicted in having to promote the program as a part of their job. Without seeing success data for their actual

students due to the newness of the Promise program, counselors wanted to encourage students to pursue four-year opportunities if they were eligible for them.

Since the Dallas County Promise is a last-dollar program, the Pell Grant covers the cost of community college in Dallas. The counselors in every cohort mentioned that most students in their schools would be eligible for the Pell Grant if they were a U.S. citizen or permanent resident. Many counselors mentioned that the use of words like "free college" and "scholarship" in messaging from the Dallas County Promise and by staff at the high schools and Dallas College is misleading. A Cohort 1 counselor spoke about parents pushing their students to take the Promise and go to Dallas College even though their goal was to attend a four-year school. The counselor noted:

> A lot of parents still don't understand… the majority of my [students'] parents won't actually receive a penny of Dallas County Promise. What they're getting is the Pell Grant that would have access to for any college that they want to attend. A student should know that they don't necessarily have to go to community college first and then to UT-Dallas to be able to afford it.

Another counselor from Cohort 1 also shared that students and families heard the term "free college" at school rallies, in pamphlets sent in the mail, and also through emails and text messages and "the terminology around it pushed this idea of free college." This would make parents believe that this is the only and best option for their child. The counselor from Cohort 2 also noted that "people really get charmed by the marketing and just by the idea that community college is always going to be cheaper" which is actually not the case considering many four-year schools, particularly those out of state, will meet full need for financial aid. A Cohort 3 counselor spoke about English literacy in Dallas overall being "pretty abysmal" and that there was

relatively little familiarity on "the modern college application process" even at schools that are considered "higher performing high schools." If the goal of the program was to get more students to take the Promise and enroll in Dallas College, then the counselor believed that although the program was "not purposefully pushing misinformation" that they were benefitting from the misinformation. They also mentioned:

> The word "scholarship" holds a very specific meaning, but it also holds a very undefined meaning for a lot of parents who just want to send their kids to college. I think using the terminology of a scholarship is misleading.

The last piece of transparency in messaging that the administrator and counselors in Cohort 1 mentioned was around the Promise Partner Schools. They noted that multiple deadlines and the different eligibility requirements for each school caused confusion for students and parents. One common misconception that the counselors mentioned was that students simply believed they would be able to attend Dallas College and then transfer after two years and still go to a four-year college for free. However, that is not how the program is designed, nor is it automatic, not even the partnerships with the four-year Promise Partner schools. The administrator also mentioned that "many Texas public [four-year] institutions are very limited in the number of transfer scholarships" so even though a student has done well academically in a community college, they find out there "really isn't a lot of money or incentive for them financially," which could lead to a student becoming discouraged and not pursuing the four-year degree. When reflecting on the goals on the Promise and college-going messaging, the administrator also pushed for transparency in messaging around the value of higher education and commented:

> When we just talk about a postsecondary credential, we're doing a great disservice to not helping students and families understand there are great educational disparities in our community that are not going to be addressed by a workplace certification…but also an associate's degree does not have the same value as a bachelor's degree. Yes, it will increase the salary of a student who's able to graduate with that associate's degree, but it's still not the same marketability and economic opportunity that you would have with a bachelor's degree.

It is apparent that this administrator and the counselors in Cohort 1, Cohort 2, and Cohort 3 do not want to limit postsecondary opportunities and have high aspirations for their students. Their recommendations are focused on providing information to ensure students and their families can make the best choice possible from all the options available to them, in addition to providing support and resources to ensure their academic success.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Introduction

The findings from this study build upon research around the potential impacts of college Promise programs on college enrollment (Ash, 2015; Bartik, Hershbein, and Lachowska, 2015; Page et al., 2018; Page & Iriti, 2016; Swanson & Ritter, 2018). I investigated the characteristics and implementation of the Dallas County Promise, a last-dollar community college program, by examining college enrollment data and interviewing an administrator and college counselors across three cohorts to understand the early evidence of changes in enrollment in both two-year community college and four-year public and private institutions in Texas since the program was introduced. In addition, I asked the counselors and administrator about their perception of the impacts of the Promise program on students and their thoughts on way to improve the program. There is a need for more research on the effectiveness of various Promise program models, particularly last-dollar programs which if left unexamined can perpetuate inequities for the most vulnerable students. Existing literature suggests that last-dollar promise programs can have a positive impact on postsecondary outcomes, but that funding tends to go to middle-income and higher-income students rather than lower-income students and that the amount and applicability of the Promise funds may affect students' enrollment options (Miller-Adams & Smith, 2018). The findings presented here support these concerns. The central goal of Promise programs is to increase higher education attainment, so although the Dallas County Promise is relatively new, it is important to examine the early evidence of the impact on students and to explore any unintended outcomes and consequences. This chapter begins with a summary of the findings as they relate to the four research questions that guided this study and their significance and contribution to the existing literature and understanding of college Promise programs. Then, I

outline some considerations for Dallas County Promise and others who may be looking into developing or implementing a last-dollar Promise program. Finally, I identify and discuss strengths and limitations of the study design and offer up recommendations for future research.

Summary of Key Findings

Characteristics and Implementation of Dallas County Promise

Dallas County Promise is a three-step process for students. In addition to filling out an online Promise Pledge form, students are also required to fill out and submit either the FAFSA or TASFA, and apply to Dallas College or a Promise Partner school. Existing research found that first-dollar programs impose less administrative burden on students and families, while last-dollar programs such as Dallas County Promise, require more paperwork which could prove to be a barrier (Deming & Dynarski, 2010; Gándara & Li, 2020).

FAFSA completion is a key requirement of the Dallas County Promise and by completing and filing the FAFSA, students are then able to receive federal financial aid, such as the Pell Grant. Although specific numbers were not presented here, it is important to acknowledge that the Dallas Promise Program also extends eligibility to students that complete the TASFA, the Texas Application for State Federal Aid. The TASFA serves as an alternative to the FAFSA for Texas residents who cannot apply for or receive federal financial aid, such as DACA and undocumented students. This allows them to apply for state aid and any funds that might be made available through the Dallas County Promise. This step is important and all the counselors made it clear that they already promote it heavily for their students regardless of whether they were a part of the Promise or not. Nevertheless, it is clear that FAFSA completion rates for these cohorts did increase after the Promise was implemented and are higher than that of

the average completion rate for 12th grade students in the state of Texas and 12th grade students from across the United States (Dallas County Promise Talent Report, 2019).

Although the Dallas County Promise program is relatively new and has been implemented similarly across Cohort 1, Cohort 2, and Cohort 3. The prevalence of messaging in the community was a key part of implementation each year. Miller-Adams and Smith (2018) posit that for Promise programs to function as effective tools of community transformation, they require buy-in across the community and that can be facilitated by a clear and simple message. In the case of Dallas County Promise and many other Promise programs this message is often, "free college." Interview participants all agreed that Dallas County Promise was successful in their marketing and messaging and they even providing information sessions and printed materials in both English and Spanish. This messaging was also seen in the community and featured prominently on public transit and on local television. When implementing a program, it is necessary to garner buy-in and the program was able to do that by recognizing what worked in their contexts.

Change in College Enrollment Rates

In Fall 2017, the year that the Promise program was introduced, 46% of graduates from Cohort 1 schools enrolled at a higher education institution in Texas. In comparison, 48% of 2017 graduates in the region and 50% of all graduates across the state of Texas enrolled in college. The percentage of all graduates enrolling in higher education in the region and state remained relatively unchanged after the Promise program was introduced. however, for Cohort 1 Promise schools, the percentage of graduates enrolling in college increased significantly after the program was introduced, from 46% in Fall 2017 to 53% in Fall 2018. Notably, Table 4.4 shows that the total number of Cohort 1 graduates enrolled in higher education in Texas went from 4,004 in Fall

2017 to 4,841 in Fall 2018, with the number of students enrolling in a two-year college increasing by 57% from 1,939 to 3,052 and the number of students enrolling in a four-year college decreasing 13% from 2,065 to 1,789. The percentage of graduates enrolling in college remained relatively the same at 52% in Fall 2019, the second year of the program and similar proportion of students in four-year and two-year schools as Fall 2018.

Although the overall percentage of Cohort 1 graduates attending college was less than the percentage of students in the region and the state prior to the introduction of Dallas County Promise, the percentage of college-bound graduates from Cohort 1 schools who decided to enroll in a four-year university in Texas had steadily been increasing, while the percentage enrolling in a two-year college decreased. In Fall 2014, 46% of college-bound graduates from Cohort 1 enrolled in a four-year university in Texas, while the remaining 54% enrolled in a two-year college. By Fall 2017, 52% of college-bound graduates enrolled in a four-year university and 48% enrolled in a two-year college. After the program was introduced, 37% of college-bound graduates enrolled in a four-year university, while the other 63% enrolled in a two-year college.

Table 4.5 presents college enrollment for Cohort 2 and it followed a similar trend to that of Cohort 1. From Fall 2018 to Fall 2019, the overall number of Cohort 2 college-bound graduates increased by 23% from 3,345 to 4,125 students. This increase in college-bound graduates led to the percentage of Cohort 2 graduates enrolling in higher education in Texas to increase from 51% of graduates enrolling to 59% of graduates in a college in Texas. The most significant increase was seen with graduates enrolling in a two-year institution increasing from 1,929 students in Fall 2018 to 2,930 students in Fall 2019, an increase of approximately 52%. The number of graduates enrolling in a four-year institution decreased by approximately 16% from 1,416 students in Fall 2018 to 1,196 students in Fall 2019.

The introduction and implementation of the Dallas County Promise program has clearly led to an increase in the overall number of students enrolling in a Texas college for graduates in Cohort 1 and Cohort 2. These positive enrollment effects are consistent with previous studies on Promise program outcomes (Ash, 2015; Bartik, Hershbein, and Lachowska, 2015; Page & Iriti, 2016; Snyder, de Brey, and Dillow, 2016; Swanson & Ritter, 2018). While there has been an overall increase in graduates from Promise schools enrolling in higher education, the most significant increase is seen with students choosing to enroll in a two-year community college, while there has been a decrease in the number of students enrolling in a four-year university. Existing literature also supports this finding, as programs that promote attendance to community colleges will increase enrollment at those two-year institutions, but in many cases, this is at the expense of four-year enrollment (Miller-Adams & Smith, 2018). For a student who is eligible to attend a four-year university to choose to attend a two-year college because of a Promise program, this could lead to less desirable outcomes considering the lower completion and transfer rates at community colleges (Jenkins & Cho, 2013). Even though many students start at two-year institution, the reality is that most community college students do not complete a credential, even when allowing six years and counting credentials earned after transferring (Ma & Baum, 2016). These numbers are even more alarming for Black, Hispanic, and low-income students, with Pell Grant recipients being less likely to receive a credential (Snyder et al., 2018). Students in Dallas are predominantly Black and Hispanic, and many come from low-income families that qualify for the Pell Grant. Thus, while the results presented here are only descriptive, they raise questions as to whether the design of the Dallas County Promise as a last-dollar community college program could actually be hindering the desired outcome of increasing higher education attainment.

Practitioners' Perceptions of Program Impact

During the interviews, participants mentioned both positive and negative impacts associated with Dallas County Promise, many of which are aligned with previous research on the potential impacts of last-dollar aid programs. The interviews revealed three ways in which counselors believe the Promise program impacted their students and community: 1) financial implications of the Promise, 2) created college-going discussion, 3) influenced college choice and college enrollment.

The first finding from participant interviews revealed that for certain student populations the Promise provided additional financial aid funding that they may not have been eligible for prior to the Promise. These populations of students include DACA and undocumented students, as well as students from moderate- or high-income households who are above the Pell Grant-eligibility threshold. Although undocumented and DACA students have been eligible to file the TASFA and receive state funds prior to the Promise program, participants revealed that these state grants can run out and many of these students do not qualify for a lot of that state aid. However, the Dallas County Promise provides financial aid up to the cost of tuition and fees to Dallas College, which can cover any gap in funding not received from Texas state grants. This also applies to students from households that do not qualify for federal or state need-based aid based on the household income. Previous research on last-dollar programs have raised equity concerns around funds going to more highly resourced students who would likely have gone to college anyway, rather than this aid being distributed to the lowest income families who need the funds the most (Perna et al., 2018; Poutre & Voight, 2018; Gándara & Li, 2020).

Second, the counselors perceived that Dallas County Promise increased exposure to and engagement around the topic of community college. Prior research has shown that the messaging

of "free college" by Promise programs has the potential to impact college aspirations (Goldrick-Rab & Miller-Adams, 2008). According to participant interviews, the marketing around and introduction of Dallas County Promise created more discussion and got students and families more engaged, some of whom were not engaged before. This allowed for counselors to have conversations and introduced the option of community college certification programs with students who were planning on going into a trade, but who were not previously considering getting a certificate due to the financial burden of college. It is important to note that this increased engagement was specifically around Dallas College and not around other options.

Third, counselors believed Dallas County Promise may have deterred at least some students who were eligible to attend a four-year from pursuing those options in favor of attending community college as part of Dallas County Promise. This supports existing literature which posits that Promise programs can shift a student's college choice toward institutions where they can use that aid and last-dollar community college programs increase enrollment at two-year colleges and not at four-year institutions (Miller-Adams & Smith, 2018; Carruthers & Fox, 2016). The counselors who were interviewed felt that it was their job to provide options and expose their students to both two- and four-year opportunities, but that the implementation of Dallas County Promise and method of Promise progress tracking that came along with the program could at times make that difficult.

Practitioner Perspectives on Program Improvement Needs

Counselors across each cohort put forth suggestions for improvement to the Dallas County Promise program as it exists today, with those recommendations focusing on either program design or implementation that they believe will improve college access and success for students in Dallas. Research shows that Promise program designs can vary and that these design

features can shape impact and student outcomes (Miller-Adams & Smith, 2018). In addition to program design, program implementation plays a role in whether a Promise program reduces equity (Perna & Smith, 2020).

Counselors interviewed for this study did not believe Dallas County Promise had much financial impact on their students because most students in Dallas and their schools are low-income and would receive the Pell Grant, which covers tuition at Dallas County College. Last-dollar awards also do not recognize that college attendance has other costs, including books, supplies, living expenses, and transportation (Perna et al., 2021). With that in mind, counselors and the administrator recommended that Dallas County Promise rethink their design and consider being a first-dollar program rather than a last-dollar community college program. Existing research has made it clear that last-dollar financial aid programs are found to provide lower average awards or even no financial award to low-income students (Harnisch & Lebioda, 2016; Perna et al., 2018). Additionally, interviewed participants recommended that the program allow students to receive the same financial aid regardless of the institution, allowing students to enroll at either a two-year or four-year institution in Texas or even out of the state. Research has found that programs that restrict the institution at which students can use their aid, specifically last-dollar community college Promise programs, are found to shift student enrollment to two-year community colleges and may have limited impact on actual degree attainment since degree completion are lower there than at four-year universities and transfer rates are low (Miller-Adams & Smith, 2018; Snyder et al., 2018). According to the Dallas County Promise Talent Report (2019), Dallas County Promise seeks to increase postsecondary completion to reduce inequity and poverty in Dallas. The program last-dollar community college design of the program may be counterproductive to that goal, which this study and prior literature also suggest.

Other counselors highlighted the need for more substantial support and resources for Promise students enrolling in community college. Dallas County Promise does include success coaches as part of their program design, which Gándara and Li (2020) suggest may be most important after students begin college to improve retention and completion. However, according to the counselors interviewed, many students who went on to Dallas College were still reaching out to them for support and help, since they were not receiving that support on campus. Some counselors even believed that although there may have been support and resources on the campus, they might not have been adequately prepared for the influx of students they would receive due to the popularity of the Promise program.

Counselors also touched on program design and specifically, eligibility criteria and the process that students must undertake to be eligible for the Promise. In addition to filling out an online Pledge form, students are also required to fill out and submit either the FAFSA or TASFA. First-dollar programs impose less administrative burden on students and families, while last-dollar programs such as Dallas County Promise, require more paperwork which could be a barrier to college access (Deming & Dynarski, 2010; Gándara & Li, 2020). Although Dallas County Promise could help undocumented students attend college by providing state aid through the TASFA, counselors faced challenges in getting undocumented students and their families to trust them in providing tax or earnings documents, which are required to fill out the TASFA and be considered for the Promise program. Counselors also faced challenges with undocumented students' documents taking longer to process. Additionally, the component of filling out and signing the "Promise Pledge" is another step required by the program. Since Dallas County Promise is a place-based program and students are eligible by the school in which they attend, it was recommended that students are auto-enrolled to simplify the process. The additional step of

signing the Pledge could be a barrier not to only students, but also takes away time from counselors to work with students and families and advise them on college opportunities. Deming and Dynarski (2010) believed that creating a simple process for students to apply for financial aid is critical in enhancing enrollment and the same logic can be applied to the process of applying to a Promise program.

The final set of considerations for improving the program relate to data and how it is used in program implementation. The capacity for data collection is an organizational condition which can moderate program implementation (Perna et al., 2021). Thus, program administrators and other stakeholders must consider the data that should be collected to track and analyze program outcomes (Millet et al., 2020). The data being tracked for Dallas County Promise is focused on inputs of Promise pledges submitted and FAFSA completions. Counselors mentioned that college acceptances and enrollment were also previously considered as a part of postsecondary outcomes success, but the Promise program has shifted away from that to focusing almost solely on Pledge and FAFSA completion. Current impact data on Dallas County Promise also only highlights the percentage of students signing the Promise Pledge, FAFSA completion rates, and increase in community college enrollment. Counselors believed that tracking transfer rates and first- and second-year retention rates would be better indicators or additional indicators to be considered for tracking Dallas County Promise success.

Implications for Practice

Promise programs are one possible way to increase college degree attainment, but even prior to implementation, the possible impacts and equity dimensions of the program must be considered. In this section I discuss some potential implications derived from this study that could be relevant for Dallas County Promise administrators and policymakers looking to

improve upon the current program and increase higher education access and degree attainment within Dallas. The findings of this study may also help other key stakeholders across high school districts, higher education institutions, community partnerships, and policymakers assess the potential impact of a last-dollar Promise program on students and higher education enrollment in their respective communities. By understanding the aspects of program implementation and design that can contribute positively to college enrollment, students' college choice and aspirations, and understanding of financial aid and college opportunities; stakeholders can potentially avoid negatively impacting students and unintended consequences that could arise from program design.

Consider Program Design That Expands Use of Promise Funds

The broader literature on Promise programs points to the importance of program design on both intended and unintended outcomes for students and the larger community (Miller-Adams & Smith, 2018; Snyder et al., 2018). When looking to increase higher education degree attainment for Dallas where students are predominantly Hispanic/Latinx or Black and also low-income, it is of utmost importance for stakeholders to consider a Promise program design that is contextually appropriate for their specific communities and provides substantial resources and support necessary for success. If policymakers and administrators want to truly achieve the goals set forth by the Dallas County Promise of increasing postsecondary degree completion, they should consider expanding the use of Dallas Promise funding in two ways: 1) allow students to utilize Promise funds at any institution, including public and private four-year colleges both in the state of Texas and outside of the state, and 2) allow Promise funds to be applied to other costs outside of tuition.

Additionally, considering that the majority of students in Dallas County are Hispanic/Latinx or Black, economically disadvantaged, and many are also the first in their family to attend college; the restrictive nature of the Dallas County Promise design which relegates students' postsecondary options to community college should be examined. Practitioners interviewed believed that their students had a higher likelihood of success and graduation from a four-year institution opposed to a two-year community college, which is a sentiment backed by previous research (Jenkins & Cho, 2013; Ma & Baum, 2016). The counselors and administrator spoke about low retention and graduation rates at the community college and about working with students who attended Dallas College and shared their experiences with lack of resources and support at the community college. If the goal of the program is truly to increase postsecondary success and degree attainment for Dallas County students, then the opportunity to attend an institution equipped with appropriate resources and support systems should be made available to them, regardless of whether those are two-year or four-year colleges in Dallas, in Texas, or outside of the state entirely.

Although the current funding design of Dallas County Promise as a last-dollar program may be financially sustainable for the program, from interviews with counselors working directly with the students and families in Promise high schools, the program is not appropriate for Dallas County as it provides little to no financial award for low-income students who need it most, especially for those who are eligible to receive the Pell Grant which entirely covers tuition at community colleges. There are many other costs associated with living and attending college, such as fees for textbooks, housing, and food. Practitioners interviewed in this study also made it clear that "free college" or simply covering the cost of tuition is not enough to increase higher education degree attainment, as tuition is a small part of being a college student and a small part

of the financial challenges their students face. Although covering tuition can play a role in making higher education accessible and even increase college enrollment, it does not make college affordable, nor does it ensure that students persist and graduate. Exploring a first-dollar model or other possible financial aid models that award and assist low-income students who need it most, could be a step in the right direction for Dallas County Promise. These expanded uses of Promise funds will actually give students more options and allow students to consider more than just the immediate financial implications of their college choice decision.

Develop Shared Goals and Success Metrics with Practitioners in Schools

To increase postsecondary degree completion and "solve the talent gap in the workforce," as this program seeks to do, Dallas County Promise administrators and decision-making stakeholders, must work collaboratively with counselors who also serve as what Matland (1995) describes as "street-level service deliverers" and who McDonough (2005) posits are the most important professionals in a school when it comes to increasing college enrollment. To do this, it includes developing shared goals around postsecondary success and ensuring counselors have adequate time to conduct college and career advising, something they believe is central to their role.

Creating shared goals around higher education enrollment with counselors can ensure alignment and appropriate measures of progress tracking. The counselors serve as institutional agents who work directly with students (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Participant responsiveness of both students and counselors, which includes their perceptions of and engagement with the program are very important to successful implementation of the program (Carroll et al., 2007). The current progress tracking for Dallas County Promise involves the county-wide sharing of data around Promise Pledge completion percentages and FAFSA completion rates for each

individual Promise high school, in addition to overall tracking of enrollment in Dallas College or a Promise partner school. According to participant interviews, filing the FAFSA or TASFA has always been a priority and responsibility that practitioners saw as important to ensuring their students receive financial aid and attend an affordable college. However, counselors did not believe completing the Pledge or ensuring their students applied to Dallas College should be one of the most important goals or that these data metrics should be used to signify student success. Furthermore, they felt that the pressure put on administrators to reach 100% completion in Pledges signed often negatively impacted their work, especially as it took away from their time and ability to conduct college and career counseling with students and families. Some counselors also noticed that the shift in emphasizing Dallas County Promise led to a deemphasis on tracking of other postsecondary measures. One such measure was the tracking of college application numbers. By not only creating shared goals with counselors, but also working collaboratively to define what success means for their students and the metrics that are meaningful in tracking success, Dallas County Promise administrators can ensure that program efforts are aligned to achieve positive outcomes.

The counselors and administrator involved in this study indicated their desire and willingness to be more involved in discussions around shared goals and data tracking metrics. Dallas County Promise should consider involving more of these "street-level service deliverers" as they are the ones involved most directly with students and families and are key to increasing college enrollment, which is a fundamental step in the program's goal of increasing college completion and degree attainment in Dallas.

Promote All College and Postsecondary Opportunities

Through the practitioner interviewers, it was found that Dallas County Promise was effective in their marketing and messaging, likely because contextual forces of the community were taken into consideration. The pervasiveness of the program through multiple channels throughout the community and in both English and Spanish added greatly to the implementation of the program and garnering buy-in for it. Smith (2019) found that low-income students who did not receive a financial award from a Promise program felt misled and became nonresponsive to further contacts from the program. Most Dallas County students who go on to become Promise Scholars will not receive a financial award, so this finding from a previous study does not bode well for the future of Dallas County Promise. Although Dallas County Promise program should explore becoming a first-dollar program, if funding models cannot be changed and Dallas County Promise remains a last-dollar program, by promoting both two-year and four-year higher education opportunities, the program can still play a role in "producing equity in college completion," which is part of the program's stated vision.

When Promise stakeholders create further marketing and program messaging, they can consider promoting all college and postsecondary opportunities and educating students and families on the realities of postsecondary success at two-year versus four-year institutions, and other opportunities beyond even just college. The marketing can even be used to provide clarity around affordability by educating students and families about financial aid and financial implications associated with degree attainment at various institution. Even if a student does not attend Dallas College or a partner school, simply ensuring students and families know about all the opportunities available and allowing them to choose and pursue the best option for them. This can help in increasing postsecondary success, which is not simply increasing higher

education enrollment, but also ensuring that students persist to the point of graduation and degree attainment.

Limitations of Research

This study offers preliminary data and insight into the implementation and potential impact of the Dallas County Promise, and aims to contribute to understanding of last-dollar community college Promise programs, an area of research that is still relatively new. However, several limitations to this study should be taken into consideration.

The first key limitation of the quantitative analyses as they relate to the effects of Dallas County Promise is that the research design of this study only offers descriptive evidence of change in college enrollment for the three Promise cohorts and a comparison to other schools in the region and state both prior to the introduction of Dallas County Promise and in the years immediately after. This reflects on one hand limitations in access to more comprehensive data on higher education enrollment, and on the other a choice to focus more extensively on practitioner perspectives of the program's impact and influence on students. Thus, the quantitative trends reported on higher education enrollment trends cannot be interpreted as evidence of causal effects of Dallas County Promise and are best seen as generating, not testing hypothesis about program effects. Subsequent studies using student-level higher education enrollment data could be used to support more rigorous quantitative modeling and analyses techniques that may support stronger causal inferences but were beyond the scope of this study (for examples of such analyses in previous studies of Promise programs see e.g. Billings, 2018; Gándara & Li, 2020; House & Dell, 2020).

Another limitation to the quantitative analyses is the accuracy of data on higher education enrollment. This study included the first three Dallas County Promise cohorts and only looks at

students enrolling in IHEs in the state of Texas, because that is the only data that is available and consistent across all cohorts and the years being examined, dating back to 2014. When accessing that data, there are records that are listed as "not found" or "not trackable." Students are counted as "not found" if they have a standard ID, but were not able to be located in a Texas institution of higher education and they are listed as "not trackable" if they had non-standard numbers that would not find a match at a Texas institution of higher education. Usually, students who are "not found" are not attending college and those who are "not trackable" might be attending a college outside of Texas. However, there are other reasons why students might also be considered "not trackable." Without being able to say with confidence that all or a specified number of "not trackable" students were attending either a two-year, or most likely a four-year in the case of students going out of state, those students had to be disregarded and the focus of the program had to be on students enrolling in the state of Texas. Since the Dallas County Promise is focused on students and schools in Dallas and this is the data that is used by both the Texas Education Agency and Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, using this data was still appropriate for this study. More specific numbers around how many of the "not trackable" students were actually enrolled in college outside of Texas would have further supported the qualitative research that was conducted. Additionally, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic caused a disruption in education that greatly affected the nation and higher education enrollment. The impacts of the pandemic can be seen in enrollment data for high school graduates in the 2019-2020 academic year and will likely continue to be seen for many years moving forward.

Another limitation relates to the qualitative research and the sample size and selection of the participants. There was only one administrator involved in this study and although there were counselors from each of the Promise cohorts, there was not an equal representation of each. In

addition, the counselors chosen to be part of the interview were identified by the administrator, so there is a possibility that the counselors would hold views on the program that align with those of the administrator. Although the request for interviews went out to more administrators and counselors, due to the timing of the request and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, recruitment of more participants proved difficult. If I had been able to include more administrators and counselors from across more schools and districts, there may have been a wider variation in responses to research questions.

Naturally, the research is influenced by my own positionality and views on Promise programs, as someone working at a college access non-profit, and previous experience working in admissions consulting and college admissions/enrollment management at solely four-year institutions. While I was acutely aware of my own bias throughout the research, this bias must nevertheless be acknowledged. I believe that when designed and implemented appropriately for the intended population and with the proper resources and support that Promise programs can be highly effective in increasing higher education enrollment and attainment. Additionally, because I have visited some of the schools and know the administrator through my current and previous positions, I felt that the administrator and some of the counselors were more comfortable talking with me and sharing their thoughts on Dallas County Promise. For counselors who I may not have seen or been introduced to prior, there may have been more hesitation to speak candidly on their thoughts and experiences with the Promise program.

Suggestions for Future Research

Regarding newer Promise programs, Rios-Aguilar and Lyke (2020) recommend conducting more research studies on the impacts, efficiency, and equity dimensions of Promise programs. Although this study was able to interview counselors and an administrator in eight

different schools in Dallas County, it would be beneficial to continue this research throughout more high schools and districts across Dallas County. It would be helpful to also include students and families and other stakeholders from the Promise, Dallas College, and Promise Partner schools to discover additional impacts and recommendations that could be used to improve the program design and implementation.

There is also an opportunity to collect additional quantitative data from Dallas College and the National Student Clearinghouse for Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 to examine persistence, retention, and graduation rates for those students. These data could shed more light on the true impact of the program as it relates to higher education attainment and reducing inequities, which is the goal of the program. To truly examine impact, a longitudinal study of this nature could go on to explore both short- and long-term effects and investigate how those effects differ by student group. These groups could be broken down by race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sex, or even by citizenship status to see the program impacts on equity across student groups. Additional qualitative interviews or surveys with students could also be conducted to provide a more robust study on impacts, both real and perceived.

Rios-Aguilar and Lyke (2020) also recommend providing more clarity for students about costs of attendance and their eligibility for funds. Quantitative data around financial aid for students in these cohorts could also be collected and used to examine distribution of Promise funding and to determine which students are receiving aid. This could show the impact of that aid on their college enrollment and success and additional qualitative data collection through interviews or surveys with those students could also reveal how their understanding of these have influenced their decisions and academic success. This could also be examined by similar groupings of students previously listed.

Another recommendation for a future study could be to collect and analyze the impact of the program on academic preparation and how this program does or does not encourage change in the K-12 sector. This future study could examine the implications or impacts that the Promise program has on curriculum offerings, testing and GPA scores, migration and homelessness, behavioral issues, rates of dropout, or a variety of other characteristics provided in the Texas Academic Performance Reports (TAPR). On the opposite end, future research could also do a similar study with a focus on the impact of Dallas County Promise on the workforce. Promise programs hold implications for local prosperity and Dallas County Program specifically has a stated goal of "helping workforce solve the talent gap," so a study of that nature would add to an understanding of the program's intended goals.

Conclusion

This study explored the implementation of a last-dollar community college program, Dallas County Promise, across its first three cohorts and highlighted the change in higher education enrollment and other potential impacts after the introduction of the program. Although the interview participants represented a fraction of Promise high schools and were primarily counselors, they provided qualitative data that complemented the higher education enrollment data and provided perspective on possible impacts and implications for improving the program. This study adds to the growing literature on last-dollar community college Promise programs in areas with high population of Black and Hispanic/Latinx students and low-income students. Furthermore, this study may spur additional studies which include institutional agents, such as counselors, who are known to play a role in promoting access to higher education and influencing students' college choice.

While this study concluded that the introduction and implementation of the Dallas County Promise program has increased the overall number of graduates enrolling in higher education in Texas from Promise high schools, the increase is seen primarily in the two-year college sector. The decrease in graduates enrolling in a four-year institution suggests that at least some students who would have been eligible to attend a four-year institution decided to enroll in community college instead. This type of shift in college enrollment goals and decisions should be examined further as the program continues to ensure alignment of program goals and outcomes for equity, especially for underrepresented minority and low-income students. Although the study was impacted by the pandemic, the results can provide insight into the current program and its potential impacts, as well as directions for future program redesign and discussion on ways to improve the program to promote equity, increase higher education enrollment, and postsecondary success for participating students.

Appendix A

Cohort 1 Student Demographic Information (2016-2017)

Table A1

Racial Demographics of Dallas County Promise Cohort 1 Schools and Districts (2016-2017)

	Total Students	African American	Hispanic	White	Asian	American Indian	Pacific Islander	Two or More Races
	n	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Texas (Statewide)	5,343,834	12.6	52.4	28.1	4.2	0.4	0.1	2.2
Carrollton-Farmers Branch ISD	25,196	16.6	56.0	13.5	10.8	0.3	0.1	2.7
Early College High	311	4.2	83.3	5.1	6.4	0	0.3	0.6
Cedar Hill ISD	7,866	66.7	23.7	5.9	1.2	0.3	0.2	2.9
Cedar Hill Collegiate	406	58.9	28.3	6.9	3.9	0	0.2	1.7
Cedar Hill	1,707	71.9	21.1	3.8	0.8	0.2	0.1	2.1
Dallas ISD	157,787	22.5	70.0	5.1	1.4	0.3	0.1	0.6
Bryan Adams	2,040	12.5	79.3	5.1	2.4	0.3	0	0.5
David W. Carter	1,141	71.3	26.6	1.6	0.2	0.3	0	0.1
Dr. Wright L. Lassiter	237	13.1	82.3	3.4	1.3	0	0	0
Emmett J. Conrad	1,270	20.2	57.2	2.5	19.5	0.2	0	0.5
Franklin D. Roosevelt	653	45.6	53	0.6	0	0.5	0	0.3
H. Grady Spruce	1,767	19.2	78.6	1.8	0	0.2	0	0.2

Hillcrest	1,097	16	74.5	7.4	1.3	0.3	0	0.5
James Madison	479	65.8	32.6	1.3	0	0	0	0.4
Justin F. Kimball	1,504	29.9	68.3	0.9	0.3	0.3	0.1	0.1
Kathlyn Joy Gilliam Collegiate Academy	364	49.7	49.2	0.5	0	0.3	0	0.3
L.G. Pinkston	978	25.3	73.2	0.9	0.2	0.4	0	0
Lincoln High School and Communications/ Humanities Magnet	545	78	21.5	0	0	0.2	0.2	0.2
Moises Molina	2,123	2.7	96.2	0.7	0.2	0.1	0	0.1
North Dallas	1,059	17.2	76.9	1.8	3.2	0.7	0	0.3
Seagoville	1,389	20.6	64.1	14.1	0.1	0.3	0.1	0.6
South Oak Cliff	1,286	69.6	29.2	0.5	0.4	0.2	0	0.2
Sunset High	1,966	1.3	97	1.1	0.1	0.3	0.1	0.2
Thomas Jefferson	1,701	3.4	95.3	0.6	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.2
Trini Garza ECHS	425	9.4	88	1.2	0.7	0	0	0.7
W.H. Adamson	1,480	2.7	96.5	0.4	0.2	0.2	0	0
W.T. White	2,261	10.5	78.9	7.5	1.7	0.3	0.1	1.1
W.W. Samuell	1,869	20.4	77.7	1.1	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2
Wilmer-Hutchins	818	62.3	35.2	1.7	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.2
DeSoto ISD	9,742	76.6	18.7	2.4	0.3	0.2	0.0	1.8

DeSoto High	3,214	80.9	14.6	2.5	0.3	0.3	0.1	1.3
Garland ISD	57,029	17.4	50.2	19.5	8.7	1.7	0.1	2.3
Lakeview Centennial	2,208	29.8	42.1	18.9	6.2	0.5	0	2.5
Grand Prairie ISD	29,287	18.0	64.5	12.1	3.1	0.4	0.1	1.8
Grand Prairie	2,730	15.3	75.5	7.4	0.5	0.5	0	0.8
South Grand Prairie	3,393	24.7	55.1	12.8	4.8	0.5	0.1	2
Lancaster ISD	7,634	76.2	19.8	1.9	0.2	0.5	0.1	1.3
Lancaster High	2,074	77.3	19.2	1.7	0.1	0.9	0	0.7
Mean	1435.3	33.2	60.3	3.7	1.8	0.3	0.1	0.6
Median	1389	20.6	68.3	1.7	0.3	0.3	0	0.3
Standard Deviation	839.9	26.9	26.5	4.5	3.8	0.2	0.1	0.7

Note. All data retrieved from the Texas Education Agency 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 Texas Academic Performance Reports (TAPR).

Table A2

Distribution of Students by Socioeconomic and Learning Status in Dallas County Promise Program Schools and Districts (2016-2017)

	Economically Disadvantaged[a]	English Language Learners (ELL)	Students with Disciplinary Placements[b]	At-Risk[c]	Students with Intellectual Disabilities[d]	Mobility[e]
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Texas (Statewide)	59.0	18.9	1.3	50.3	44.5	16.0
Carrollton-Farmers Branch ISD	64.5	28.5	1.3	52.6	37.2	15.8
Early College High	82.3	5.8	1.3	18.6	0	3.8
Cedar Hill ISD	68.2	7.5	2.6	42.2	48.2	16.3
Cedar Hill Collegiate	45.3	2	2.4	14.5	0	6.0
Cedar Hill	62.9	1.1	1.7	54.4	63.7	17.1
Dallas ISD	87.8	43.9	1.1	63.4	45.2	19.9
Bryan Adams	89.5	33.9	5.6	67.7	69.4	13.8
David W. Carter	73.4	18.6	2.3	70.4	62.6	12.8
Dr. Wright L. Lassiter	82.7	5.5	2.7	21.1	-1	22
Emmett J. Conrad	89.8	59.1	3	79.5	62.1	20.7
Franklin D. Roosevelt	94.5	30.8	3.4	82.5	73	22.2
H. Grady	88.5	47.3	0.5	81.8	76.5	26.4

Spruce						
Hillcrest	79.4	33.5	2.1	66.5	62.2	32.7
James Madison	96.7	16.5	1.9	75.2	76.5	20.9
Justin F. Kimball	78.5	32	4.1	73.5	77.6	18.7
Kathlyn Joy Gilliam Collegiate Academy	83.5	13.2	1.7	36.5	0	27.5
L.G. Pinkston	92	32.7	4.3	76.2	71.4	21.9
Lincoln High School and Communications/ Humanities Magnet	93.2	14.9	1.5	74.9	68.5	24
Moises Molina	94.3	29.1	1	62.9	58.9	25.5
North Dallas	94.1	34.7	1.3	79	64.5	20.5
Seagoville	91.9	30	1.9	69.5	62.9	28.7
South Oak Cliff	77.8	16	0	76.1	81.7	5.2
Sunset High	96	28.3	0.4	64.6	75.7	1.3
Thomas Jefferson	82.2	64.6	1.1	83.5	78.7	22.5
Trini Garza ECHS	86.6	5.2	5.9	18.1	0	19.2
W.H. Adamson	92.8	32.8	1.7	69.1	73.1	12.4
W.T. White	80.1	28.3	5.9	64.6	69.3	21.2

W.W. Samuell	97.7	40.8	3.4	75.2	68.3	13.5
Wilmer-Hutchins	85.5	18.8	4.9	69.4	73.6	19.1
DeSoto ISD	72.0	7.2	2.4	53.7	52.3	23.7
DeSoto High	63.9	2.3	1.3	50.8	71.7	12.3
Garland ISD	63.8	27.7	0.9	49.2	35.4	14.2
Lakeview Centennial	61.2	5.3	2.0	35.5	56.1	13.0
Grand Prairie ISD	75.6	29.1	1.8	63.8	46.9	16.5
Grand Prairie	84.7	32.8	4.9	76.1	75.2	27.1
South Grand Prairie	63	12.2	0	62.2	60.8	5.1
Lancaster ISD	86.6	7.8	2.8	57.1	58.9	20.4
Lancaster High	77.9	2.3	2.8	47.1	81	15.9
Mean	82.6	23.6	2.5	61.2	58.5	17.8
Median	84.7	28.3	2	69.1	68.5	19.2
Standard Deviation	12.5	16.6	1.7	20.7	27.0	7.9

Note. All data retrieved from the Texas Education Agency 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 Texas Academic Performance Reports (TAPR).

[a]Economically Disadvantaged is the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced price lunch or eligible for other public assistance (Data source: TSDS PEIMS 40100 and STAAR). [b]At-Risk is the percentage of students identified as being at risk of dropping out of school as defined by TEC §29.081(d) and (d-1) (Data source: TSDS PEIMS 40100). [c]Students with Disciplinary Placements is the percentage of students placed in alternative education programs under Chapter 37 of the Texas Education Code (Discipline; Law and Order). [d]Students with Intellectual Disabilities is the percentage of students with an Intellectual Disability (ID), Learning Disability (LD), Developmental Delay (DD), or Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) (TSDS PEIMS disability codes 06, 08, 12, 13). [e]Mobility is the percentage of students who have been in membership at a school for less than 83 percent of the school year (i.e., missed six or more weeks).

Table A3

College Readiness[a] of Dallas County Promise Program School Students by Race (2016-2017)

	All Student Rate	African American	Hispanic	White	Asian	American Indian	Pacific Islander	Two or More Races
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Early College High	100	—	100	—	—	*	*	—
Cedar Hill Collegiate	23.4	22.1	24.5	40	—	—	*	9.1
Cedar Hill	100	100	100	—	—	*	*	—
Bryan Adams	36.7	13.2	38.5	52.4	20	—	*	—
W.H. Adamson	23.4	0	23.5	—	—	—	*	*
Moises Molina	26.9	0	27.1	—	—	*	*	—
Hillcrest	38.5	24.1	40.1	53.8	—	*	*	—
Thomas Jefferson	24.4	9.1	25.5	—	—	*	*	—
Justin F. Kimball	18.7	8.6	23.7	—	*	*	—	*
Lincoln High School & Communications/ Humanities Magnet	8.7	7.9	13.3	*	*	*	—	*
L.G. Pinkston	13.1	2.1	17.9	—	—	*	*	*
Franklin D. Roosevelt	12.6	10.8	14	*	*	*	*	*
W.W. Samuell	28.1	14.9	32.9	—	—	—	—	*
Seagovill	32.9	17.2	42.2	19.6	—	—	*	—

e								
South Oak Cliff	5.6	4.3	10.9	*	*	*	*	—
H. Grady Spruce	12.5	6	13.7	—	*	*	*	*
Sunset High	29.4	0	29.3	—	—	*	*	*
W.T. White	40.4	12.8	40.1	62.1	58.3	—	—	42.9
David W. Carter	10.2	7.5	17.3	*	*	*	*	*
North Dallas	23.6	11.1	24.8	—	28.6	*	*	*
Emmett J. Conrad	19.2	28.6	21.4	—	7.1	—	*	*
James Madison	12.2	16.9	0	—	*	*	*	*
Kathlyn Joy Gilliam Collegiate Academy	75	74.5	75	*	*	—	*	*
Trini Garza ECHS	100	100	100	—	*	*	*	—
Dr. Wright L. Lassiter	100	100	100	—	—	*	*	*
Wilmer-Hutchins	10.4	7.6	18.6	*	*	—	*	—
DeSoto High	30.4	29.3	32.2	57.1	—	—	*	20
Lakeview Centennial	48.1	32.5	51	63.9	69.2	40	—	40
Grand Prairie	32.8	22.5	34.4	35	—	—	*	—
South Grand Prairie	37.7	30.8	33.4	53.1	69.4	0	*	52.4
Lancaster	22.3	20.4	29	23.1	*	—	*	—

High	
Mean	35.4
Median	26.9
Standard Deviation	28.8

Note. All data retrieved from the Texas Education Agency 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 Texas Academic Performance Reports (TAPR). "*" indicates results masked due to small numbers to protect student confidentiality. "—" indicates there are no students in the group.

[a]College Readiness is demonstrated in any one of the following ways: 1) Texas Success Initiative (TSI) Criteria: A graduate meeting the TSI college readiness standards in both ELA/reading and mathematics; specifically, meeting the college-ready criteria on the TSI assessment, SAT, ACT, or by successfully completing and earning credit for a college prep course as defined in TEC §28.014, in both ELA and mathematics. (Data source: TSDS PEIMS 43415, THECB, College Board, and ACT, Inc.) 2) Meet Criteria on Advanced Placement (AP)/International Baccalaureate (IB) Examination: A graduate meeting the criterion score on an AP or IB examination in any subject area. Criterion score is 3 or more for AP and 4 or more for IB. (Data source: College Board or IB) 3) Earn Dual Course Credits: A graduate completing and earning credit for at least three credit hours in ELA or mathematics or at least nine credit hours in any subject. (Data source: TSDS PEIMS 43415) 4) Earn an Associate's Degree: A graduate earning an associate's degree while in high school. (Data source: TSDS PEIMS 40100/49010)

Table A4

College Readiness of Students by Socioeconomic and Learning Status in Dallas County Promise Program Schools and Districts (2016-2017)

	Economically Disadvantaged[a]	English Language Learners (ELL)	At-Risk[c]	Students with Intellectual Disabilities[d]
	%	%	%	%
Early College High	100	—	100	*
Cedar Hill Collegiate	19.9	—	13	0
Cedar Hill	100	*	100	—
Bryan Adams	36.7	25.3	23.7	9.7
W.H. Adamson	23	2	9.4	0
Moises Molina	26.5	12	11.8	2.7
Hillcrest	38.3	28.2	24.5	8.7
Thomas Jefferson	23.6	20	14.8	6.3
Justin F. Kimball	20	22.9	7	0
Lincoln High School & Communications/ Humanities Magnet	8.4	0	3.2	0
L.G. Pinkston	13.3	2.9	7.5	0
Franklin D. Roosevelt	11	6.3	10.2	0
W.W. Samuell	28.1	13.6	16.2	0
Seagoville	33.5	45.8	27.8	0
South Oak Cliff	5.9	0	1.5	0
H. Grady Spruce	12.1	11.8	8.5	3.3
Sunset High	29.3	13.8	11.5	5.7
W.T. White	37.3	31.9	22	5.1
David W. Carter	9	4.8	5.4	0
North Dallas	23.3	25	15.6	0
Emmett J. Conrad	19.4	5.9	5.8	6.3
James Madison	12.2	0	2.1	0

Kathlyn Joy Gilliam Collegiate Academy	72.2	83.3	64	—
Trini Garza ECHS	100	—	100	*
Dr. Wright L. Lassiter	100	—	100	*
Wilmer-Hutchins	11.4	0	6.3	0
DeSoto High	25.9	14.3	14.1	2.8
Lakeview Centennial	42.6	33.3	22.6	5.3
Grand Prairie	31.5	25.5	23	3.6
South Grand Prairie	32.3	16.9	15.5	3.3
Lancaster High	21.3	16.7	8.3	0
Mean	34.5		33.8	
Median	25.9		24.1	
Standard Deviation	28.7		29.6	

Note. All data retrieved from the Texas Education Agency 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 Texas Academic Performance Reports (TAPR).

[a]Economically Disadvantaged is the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced price lunch or eligible for other public assistance (Data source: TSDS PEIMS 40100 and STAAR). [b]At-Risk is the percentage of students identified as being at risk of dropping out of school as defined by TEC §29.081(d) and (d-1) (Data source: TSDS PEIMS 40100). [c]Students with Disciplinary Placements is the percentage of students placed in alternative education programs under Chapter 37 of the Texas Education Code (Discipline; Law and Order). [d]Students with Intellectual Disabilities is the percentage of students with an Intellectual Disability (ID), Learning Disability (LD), Developmental Delay (DD), or Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) (TSDS PEIMS disability codes 06, 08, 12, 13). [e]Mobility is the percentage of students who have been in membership at a school for less than 83 percent of the school year (i.e., missed six or more weeks).
"*" indicates results masked due to small numbers to protect student confidentiality. "—" indicates there are no students in the group.

Table A5

Racial Demographics of Dallas County Promise Program High Schools Graduates (2016-2017)

	Total Students	African American	Hispanic	White	Asian	American Indian	Pacific Islander	Two or More Races
	n	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Early College High	56	3.6	87.5	3.6	3.6	0	0	1.8
Cedar Hill Collegiate	496	71.2	21.4	4	0.8	0.4	0	2.2
Cedar Hill	98	64.3	26.5	4.1	4.1	0	0	1
Bryan Adams	392	9.7	82.9	5.4	1.3	0.3	0	0.5
W.H. Adamson	304	2	96.4	0.7	0.7	0.3	0	0
Moises Molina	435	2.1	96.6	0.9	0.2	0	0	0.2
Hillcrest	252	21.4	66.3	10.3	0.8	0	0	1.2
Thomas Jefferson	270	4.1	94.4	0.4	0.7	0	0	0.4
Justin F. Kimball	252	36.9	61.9	0.8	0	0	0.4	0
Lincoln High School & Communications/ Humanities Magnet	92	82.6	16.3	0	0	0	1.1	0
L.G. Pinkston	168	28.6	69.6	1.2	0.6	0	0	0

Franklin D. Roosevelt	87	42.5	57.5	0	0	0	0	0
W.W. Samuell	302	24.5	73.5	1	0.3	0.3	0.3	0
Seagoville	277	20.9	59.9	16.6	0.7	0.4	0	1.4
South Oak Cliff	232	79.7	19.8	0	0	0	0	0.4
H. Grady Spruce	265	18.9	80	1.1	0	0	0	0
Sunset High	442	1.6	97.3	0.9	0.2	0	0	0
W.T. White	480	9.8	73.3	12.1	2.5	0.6	0.2	1.5
David W. Carter	186	72	28	0	0	0	0	0
North Dallas	182	14.8	79.7	1.6	3.8	0	0	0
Emmett J. Conrad	198	17.7	59.1	1.5	21.2	0.5	0	0
James Madison	82	72	26.8	1.2	0	0	0	0
Kathlyn Joy Gilliam Collegiate Academy	100	55	44	0	0	1	0	0
Trini Garza ECHS	99	11.1	86.9	1	0	0	0	1
Dr. Wright L. Lassiter	59	11.9	84.7	1.7	1.7	0	0	0
Wilmer-Hutchins	164	72.6	26.2	0	0	0.6	0	0.6
DeSoto High	645	82.6	14	2.2	0.2	0.3	0	0.8

Lakeview Centennial	497	32.2	39.8	19.5	5.2	1	0.2	2
Grand Prairie	451	15.7	73.4	8.9	0.9	0.4	0	0.7
South Grand Prairie	700	24.1	53	14	5.1	0.7	0	3
Lancaster High	421	80.5	14.7	3.1	0	1	0	0.7
Mean	280.1	35.1	58.4	3.8	1.8	0.3	0.1	0.6
Median	252	24.1	61.9	1.2	0.6	0	0	0.4
Standard Deviation	175.2	28.9	28.0	5.3	3.9	0.3	0.2	0.8

Note. All data retrieved from the Texas Education Agency 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 Texas Academic Performance Reports (TAPR).

Table A6

Distribution of Dallas County Promise Program High School Graduates by Socioeconomic and Learning Status (2016-2017)

	Total Students	Economically Disadvantaged	English Language Learners (ELL)	At-Risk	Students with Intellectual Disabilities
	n	%	%	%	%
Early College High	56	80.4	3.6	12.5	0
Cedar Hill Collegiate	496	58.7	0.2	51.2	5.4
Cedar Hill	98	51	0	11.2	1
Bryan Adams	392	89	20.2	45.2	7.9
W.H. Adamson	304	95.7	16.8	45.7	5.9
Moises Molina	435	95.4	24.8	54.5	8.5
Hillcrest	252	76.6	15.5	59.9	9.1
Thomas Jefferson	270	84.8	44.4	67.4	5.9
Justin F. Kimball	252	83.3	13.9	56.3	7.5
Lincoln High School & Communications/ Humanities Magnet	92	90.2	9.8	67.4	13
L.G. Pinkston	168	94	20.2	63.1	8.9
Franklin D. Roosevelt	87	94.3	18.4	67.8	13.8
W.W. Samuell	302	94.4	26.8	59.3	10.9
Seagoville	277	88.4	21.3	58.5	8.3
South Oak Cliff	232	81	7.8	56	15.1
H. Grady Spruce	265	90.2	35.1	66.8	11.3
Sunset High	442	92.8	13.1	43.2	7.9
W.T. White	480	77.1	9.8	43.5	8.1
David W. Carter	186	77.4	11.3	49.5	10.8
North Dallas	182	94.5	24.2	67	16.5
Emmett J.	198	93.9	51.5	69.2	8.1

Conrad					
James Madison	82	100	8.5	57.3	14.6
Kathlyn Joy Gilliam Collegiate Academy	100	90	6	25	2
Trini Garza ECHS	99	87.9	4	13.1	0
Dr. Wright L. Lassiter	59	79.7	3.4	20.3	0
Wilmer-Hutchins	164	90.9	12.2	58.5	15.2
DeSoto High	645	57.4	1.1	37.4	5.6
Lakeview Centennial	497	55.7	3.6	23.1	7.6
Grand Prairie	451	80.9	23.5	61.6	12.4
South Grand Prairie	700	56.1	8.4	48	8.7
Lancaster High	421	79.1	1.4	42.8	8.6
Mean	280.1	82.6	14.9	48.5	8.3
Median	252	87.9	12.2	54.5	8.3
Standard Deviation	175.2	13.6	12.6	17.7	4.6

Note. All data retrieved from the Texas Education Agency 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 Texas Academic Performance Reports (TAPR).

Table A7

Percentage of High School Graduates from Dallas County Promise Schools Enrolled in a Texas Institution of Higher Education, Pre- and Post- Program (Fall 2015 - Fall 2019 Enrollment)

	2014 Graduates Enrolled in Fall 2015	2015 Graduates Enrolled in Fall 2016	2016 Graduates Enrolled in Fall 2017	2017 Graduates Enrolled in Fall 2018	2018 Graduates Enrolled in Fall 2019
	%	%	%	%	%
Early College High	64	66.2	76.9	82.5	75
Cedar Hill Collegiate	60.2	57.1	56.2	57.1	59.8
Cedar Hill	82.7	83.3	74.4	77.6	84
Bryan Adams	49.4	43.6	48.1	53.1	54.5
W.H. Adamson	46.9	54.7	48.1	49.3	56
Moises Molina	54.5	53.2	49.2	48.5	56.6
Hillcrest	52.4	54.8	49.4	49.2	55.4
Thomas Jefferson	36	34.9	37.2	35.9	42.6
Justin F. Kimball	39	47.5	47.5	46.4	51.6
Lincoln High School & Communications/ Humanities Magnet	39.9	39.3	43.7	60.9	59.8
L.G. Pinkston	37.4	40.6	32.9	38.1	43
Franklin D. Roosevelt	47.2	36.8	36	34.5	35.7
W.W. Samuell	37	31.4	34.8	41.7	37.9
Seagoville	41.6	40.5	35.4	46.9	43.2
South Oak Cliff	40.4	48.1	40.8	40.1	49.8
H. Grady Spruce	31.4	34.9	32.1	34.7	44.5
Sunset High	54.8	54.1	48.1	53.6	50.9
W.T. White	56.4	50.1	53.9	55.4	56.2
David W. Carter	52.8	47.4	46.3	47.8	49.5
North Dallas	46.3	47.2	42.9	40.1	46.4

Emmett J. Conrad	47.3	44.9	38.9	39.4	43.7
James Madison	47.4	44.4	40.8	52.4	54.1
Kathlyn Joy Gilliam Collegiate Academy	75.9	81.3	75.9	79	72.5
Trini Garza ECHS	73.7	72.3	70.9	78.8	79.2
Dr. Wright L. Lassiter	75.5	76	77.2	79.7	69.1
Wilmer-Hutchins	50.6	48.2	47.2	47	43.3
DeSoto High	55.6	54.7	57.8	60.2	57.3
Lakeview Centennial	64.7	65.9	61.5	61.5	69.5
Grand Prairie	44.8	48.1	48.6	47.3	54
South Grand Prairie	61	60.7	56.2	56	69.1
Lancaster High	56.4	62.1	63.1	64.1	65.1
Mean	52.4	52.4	50.7	53.5	55.8
Median	50.6	48.2	48.1	49.3	54.5
Standard Deviation	12.8	13.4	13.5	14.1	12.3

Note. All data retrieved from the Texas Education Agency 2016-2017, 2017-2018, 2018-2019, and 2019-2020 Texas Academic Performance Reports (TAPR).

Table A8

Region and Statewide Comparison with Dallas County Promise Schools of High School Graduates Enrolled in a Texas Institution of Higher Education, Pre- and Post- Program (Fall 2015 - Fall 2019 Enrollment)

	2014 Graduates Enrolled in Fall 2015	2015 Graduates Enrolled in Fall 2016	2016 Graduates Enrolled in Fall 2017	2017 Graduates Enrolled in Fall 2018	2018 Graduates Enrolled in Fall 2019
	%	%	%	%	%
Average of Promise High Schools	52.4	52.4	50.7	53.5	55.8
Region 10	56.8	55.6	53.7	54.1	53.9
Texas (Statewide)	57.5	56.1	54.7	54.6	53.4

Note. All data retrieved from the Texas Education Agency 2016-2017, 2017-2018, 2018-2019, and 2019-2020 Texas Academic Performance Reports (TAPR).

Appendix B

Cohort 1 School and Teacher Demographic Information (2016-2017)

Table B1

Racial Demographics of Dallas County Promise Program Full Time Teaching Staff (2016-2017)

	Total Full Time Teachers			African American	Hispanic	White	Asian	American Indian	Two or More Races
		Male	Female						
	n	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Early College High	14	35.7	64.3	14.3	7.1	78.6	0	0	0
Cedar Hill Collegiate	11 1.3	53	47	40.2	6.3	52	1.5	0	0
Cedar Hill	13	15.4	84.6	38.5	15.4	30.8	0	7.7	7.7
Bryan Adams	12 3	51.5	48.5	21.4	23.4	46.9	2.6	0.8	4.9
W.H. Adamson	89. 7	54.9	45.1	28.3	23.5	35.7	9.1	2.2	1.2
Moises Molina	12 5.2	45.3	54.7	25.4	29.6	37.7	4.1	0.8	2.4
Hillcrest	74. 6	37.9	62.1	28.2	24.2	39.6	6.7	1.3	0
Thomas Jefferson	11 6.7	38.8	61.2	24	19.1	47.4	7.8	0.9	0.9
Justin F. Kimball	88. 5	47.6	52.4	64.1	10.6	17.7	3.5	1.1	3

Lincoln High School & Communications/ Humanities Magnet	43	46.5	53.5	76.7	2.3	18.6	2.3	0	0
L.G. Pinkston	73.3	44	56	50.7	15	24.8	4.1	2.7	2.7
Franklin D. Roosevelt	48.3	63.5	36.5	70.2	4.3	23.1	2.3	0	0
W.W. Samuell	122.4	47.6	52.4	37	16.5	39.5	4.4	0.8	1.8
Seagoville	88.7	51.8	48.2	35.8	17.9	41.8	0	0	4.5
South Oak Cliff	82	47	53	82.8	6.8	8.9	0.3	1.2	0
H. Grady Spruce	110.1	41.5	58.5	43.8	14.7	37.7	2.8	0.9	0
Sunset High	120.5	50.6	49.4	28.9	21.3	35.3	8.1	2.5	3.1
W.T. White	132.3	44.8	55.2	22.7	11.3	59.9	1.5	0	4.5
David W. Carter	67.8	39.8	60.2	73.1	4.6	12.2	3	0	7
North Dallas	82	40.5	59.5	29.3	17.3	35.2	14.6	1.2	2.4
Emmett J. Conrad	87.4	38.9	61.1	34.6	12.6	36.7	11.4	0	4.6
James Madison	41.7	49.2	50.8	75.2	2.4	19.7	2.7	0	0

Kathlyn Joy Gilliam Collegiate Academy	20	50	50	60	20	15	0	0	5
Trini Garza ECHS	20.5	46.3	53.7	29.3	39	31.7	0	0	0
Dr. Wright L. Lassiter	14.1	36	64	36.3	7.1	49.6	0	0	7.1
Wilmer-Hutchins	59.3	55.6	44.4	66.6	13.6	11	3.6	0	5.2
DeSoto High	206.4	47.5	52.5	62.7	8.3	24.5	1.5	1	1.6
Lakeview Centennial	153.8	49.1	50.9	25.8	8.8	59.5	3.9	0.6	1.3
Grand Prairie	196.6	50.4	49.6	21.5	13.1	60.7	2.3	0	2.4
South Grand Prairie	218	41.4	58.6	16.2	10	71.6	0.5	0.5	1.3
Lancaster High	116.4	46	54	73.1	5.2	18.3	0.9	0	2.6
Mean	92.3	45.4	54.6	43.1	13.9	36.2	3.4	0.8	2.5
Median	88.5	46.5	53.5	36.3	13.1	35.7	2.6	0.5	2.4
Standard Deviation	54.5	8.3	8.3	20.9	8.4	17.9	3.6	1.5	2.3

Note. All data retrieved from the Texas Education Agency 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 Texas Academic Performance Reports (TAPR). Pacific Islander is not listed due to all percentages being zero with the exception of two schools which were still both less than one percent.

Table B2

Years of Experience and Highest Degree Held by Dallas County Promise Program Full Time Teaching Staff (2016-2017)

	No Degree	Bachelors	Masters	Doctorate	Beginning	1-5 Years	6-10 Years	11-20 Years	Over 20 Years
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Early College High	0	50	42.9	7.1	0	28.5	28.6	35.7	7.1
Cedar Hill Collegiate	6.5	52.4	39.3	1.8	10.1	28.2	20.4	31.6	9.7
Cedar Hill	0	53.8	46.2	0	7.7	61.5	15.4	0	15.4
Bryan Adams	2.4	70	25.1	2.4	16.3	37.8	16.1	21.5	8.3
W.H. Adamson	5.6	61.7	30.5	2.2	17.9	35.7	14.7	24.6	7.1
Moises Molina	2.4	78.1	18.7	0.8	19.2	39.4	16.2	19.5	5.7
Hillcrest	1.5	69.4	26.4	2.7	13.4	36.2	15.5	18.6	16.3
Thomas Jefferson	2.6	66.4	29.3	1.7	17.2	52.3	7	14.8	8.6
Justin F. Kimball	5.7	70.5	23.7	0	13.7	34	11.7	22	18.6
Lincoln High School & Communications/ Humaniti	9.3	51.2	39.5	0	16.3	16.3	18.6	34.9	14

es Magnet									
L.G. Pinkston	5.6	65.8	27.3	1.4	15	35.5	13.7	24.8	11
Franklin D. Roosevelt	0.2	61.3	38.6	0	8.3	48.4	17	12.7	13.6
W.W. Samuell	3.4	66.1	28	2.6	8.2	45.2	18.4	17.4	10.8
Seagoville	9.1	63	26.8	1.1	14.7	32.5	18.9	21.4	12.5
South Oak Cliff	2.5	61.7	32.1	3.7	18.3	36	13.9	18.7	13.1
H. Grady Spruce	7.5	65.2	26.5	0.9	27.2	39.1	8.6	15.8	9.3
Sunset High	1.8	74.9	22.5	0.8	12.2	37.3	16.1	23.1	11.3
W.T. White	0.8	70.5	27.2	1.5	12.1	27.2	23.4	21.6	15.7
David W. Carter	1.6	61.6	34.6	2.2	9.1	20.4	20.8	36	13.8
North Dallas	1.4	69.9	26.3	2.4	11	31.6	24.6	17.3	15.5
Emmett J. Conrad	7	61.7	30.1	1.1	9.2	41.6	13.6	29.1	6.6
James Madison	7.2	56	36.8	0	7.2	29.6	17.4	19.2	26.7
Kathlyn Joy Gilliam Collegiate Academy	0	60	40	0	5	25	30	10	30

Trini Garza ECHS	4.9	36.6	48.8	9.8	4.9	9.8	48.8	24.4	12.2
Dr. Wright L. Lassiter	0	49.8	50.2	0	0	28.9	7.1	42.5	21.5
Wilmer-Hutchins	3.5	64.1	29	3.4	17	24	12.7	32.5	13.8
DeSoto High	2.2	58.2	36.7	2.9	8.9	28.4	23.9	26.1	12.6
Lakeview Centennial	0	56.9	40.5	2.6	5.8	25	24.3	33.6	11.2
Grand Prairie	0.5	75.5	23.4	0.6	7.2	43.1	20	20.4	9.2
South Grand Prairie	0	70.8	27.5	1.7	5	34.5	24.8	22.2	13.5
Lancaster High	1.7	62.1	34.5	1.7	8.6	33.5	20.3	28	9.6
Mean	3.1	62.4	32.5	1.9	11.2	33.8	18.8	23.2	13.0
Median	2.4	62.1	30.1	1.7	10.1	34	17.4	22	12.5
Standard Deviation	2.9	8.9	8.1	2.1	5.9	10.3	7.9	8.7	5.4

Note. All data retrieved from the Texas Education Agency 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 Texas Academic Performance Reports (TAPR).

Table B3

Class Size by Subject and Teacher to Student Ratio of Dallas County Promise Program Schools (2016-2017)

	English/ Language Arts	Foreign Languages	Mathematics	Science	Social Studies	Students per Teacher
	n	n	n	n	n	n
Early College High	17	.	19.9	21.2	19.7	22.2
Cedar Hill Collegiate	19.6	23	23.2	24.2	26.1	15.3
Cedar Hill	26	21	23.8	18.2	25	31.2
Bryan Adams	15	19.6	14.4	16.5	17.8	16.6
W.H. Adamson	14.4	18.4	19.1	18.8	17	16.5
Moises Molina	19.1	24.7	19.2	21.6	20.6	17
Hillcrest	17.7	22.2	20.9	22	22.9	14.7
Thomas Jefferson	18.5	16.8	17.4	21.6	19.4	14.6
Justin F. Kimball	16.6	19.8	16.5	16.6	16.5	17
Lincoln High School & Communications/ Humanities Magnet	12.3	13.7	19.8	19	16.1	12.7

L.G. Pinkston	14.2	21.9	17.2	15.5	17.2	13.3
Franklin D. Roosevelt	14.4	22.5	14.6	16.6	16.8	13.5
W.W. Samuell	13.2	23.6	18	16.4	16.4	15.3
Seagoville	16.7	20.1	15.5	16.7	16.3	15.7
South Oak Cliff	17.4	19.1	18.9	20.8	19.1	15.7
H. Grady Spruce	14.6	24.1	17.9	17.7	17.2	16.1
Sunset High	14.8	17.6	14.7	18.2	18.6	16.3
W.T. White	17.9	19.7	18.6	16.2	18.5	17.1
David W. Carter	19.2	20.4	19.2	19.7	19.1	16.8
North Dallas	12.2	15.2	13.3	13.5	14.8	12.9
Emmett J. Conrad	12.2	17.3	20.2	18.1	17.3	14.5
James Madison	11.8	12.5	12.3	13.2	12.8	11.5
Kathlyn Joy Gilliam Collegiate Academy	14.6	16.6	16.7	19.4	13.6	18.2
Trini Garza ECHS	16.8	16.3	16.9	19.8	20.4	20.7

Dr. Wright L. Lassiter	12.7	11.7	14.5	12.9	17.6	16.8
Wilmer-Hutchins	18.4	15.4	15.8	19.4	17.6	13.8
DeSoto High	15.9	22.4	19.9	21.1	20.5	15.6
Lakeview Centennial	22.7	21.7	27.4	26.5	25	14.4
Grand Prairie	19.1	24.4	20.7	22	23.3	13.9
South Grand Prairie	19.2	21.6	20.2	20.4	21.3	15.6
Lancaster High	23.1	23.9	26.4	23.7	25.1	17.8
Mean	16.7	19.6	18.5	19.0	19.0	16.2
Median	16.7	20.0	18.6	19.0	18.5	15.7
Standard Deviation	3.4	3.6	3.5	3.2	3.4	3.5

Note. All data retrieved from the Texas Education Agency 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 Texas Academic Performance Reports (TAPR).

Table B4

Advanced/Dual Credit Course Completion by Subject Area for Dallas County Promise High Schools (2016-2017)

	All Advanced Courses Grades 9-12	Advanced ELA Courses Grades 9-12	Advanced Math Courses Grades 9-12	Advanced Science Courses Grades 9-12	Advanced Social Studies Courses Grades 9-12
	%	%	%	%	%
Early College High	97.7	58.5	34.5	6.3	71.4
Cedar Hill Collegiate	20.4	1	18.8	3.2	5.3
Cedar Hill	91.6	71.5	34.7	22.3	56
Bryan Adams	36.6	15	19.2	8.5	22
W.H. Adamson	21.5	11.3	11.7	7.2	5.9
Moises Molina	33.9	15.8	19.6	4.3	12.1
Hillcrest	28.3	10.7	15.4	11.8	20.6
Thomas Jefferson	22.2	10.9	10.7	5.3	8.8
Justin F. Kimball	23.2	11.3	15.4	2.2	10.5
Lincoln High School & Communications/ Humanities Magnet	22.7	16.1	7.9	4.5	17.6
L.G. Pinkston	27.5	14.4	15.6	5.1	6.7
Franklin D. Roosevelt	14.4	6.4	5.8	3.5	6.6
W.W. Samuell	31.4	19.9	12.6	4.6	15.7
Seagoville	26.1	11.1	12.7	6.2	7.6
South Oak Cliff	25.7	7.8	14.5	3.1	13.3
H. Grady Spruce	22.7	9.1	13.5	2.7	12.1
Sunset High	33	13.4	17	7.5	15.8
W.T. White	49.1	35.9	15	6.6	19
David W. Carter	24.8	14.9	16.7	3.1	6
North Dallas	32	18.3	13.6	4.6	10

Emmett J. Conrad	40.9	12.5	13.4	7.2	19.2
James Madison	27.4	6.5	15	4.3	10
Kathlyn Joy Gilliam Collegiate Academy	88	34.9	44.2	10.3	65
Trini Garza ECHS	95.7	48.5	28.3	14.9	65.5
Dr. Wright L. Lassiter	96.6	40.4	39.4	19.6	81
Wilmer-Hutchins	31.2	11.2	20.9	6.1	14.6
DeSoto High	34.6	13.7	20	6	14.7
Lakeview Centennial	53.5	23.2	21.8	6.7	40.8
Grand Prairie	23.7	10.9	13.1	3.3	10.2
South Grand Prairie	28.7	6.8	17	7.1	10.9
Lancaster High	40.8	9.5	22.6	17.9	22.3
Mean	40.2	19.1	18.7	7.3	22.5
Median	31.2	13.4	15.6	6.1	14.6
Standard Deviation	25.3	16.2	8.9	5.0	21.6

Note. All data retrieved from the Texas Education Agency 2016-2017 Texas Academic Performance Report (TAPR).

Appendix C

Email Recruitment for Interview

Dear Name,

My name is Derek Terrell and I am a doctoral candidate at UCLA with the Department of Education. I, along with UCLA faculty advisor Dr. Jose Felipe Martinez, jfmtz@g.ucla.edu, will be conducting a study on exploring the implementation and impacts of the Dallas County Promise Program on students attending a high school participating in the program in Dallas, TX.

You are being invited to partake in this research study as you have been identified as a staff member who works closely with students on college advising at your respective high school site. Your participation will involve participating in an individual interview. The interview will take approximately 45 minutes – 60 minutes via Zoom Video Conferencing. Interviews will be recorded and study participants will be able to review, edit, and erase the recordings of their research participation if they wish to do so.

Your participation is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. The results of the research may be published, but your name will not be used. Your anonymity will be protected, and the process does not pose any risk or harm to the participants in any way.

If you choose to participate in the group interview, **you will receive a $25 e-gift card of your choice** (Amazon or Starbucks) at the end of the interview.

If you are willing to participate, please let me know and we can look to schedule a meeting time next week or the following. Thank you in advance for your support in this research project!

Sincerely,

Derek Terrell
UCLA Educational Leadership Program
dterrell86@g.ucla.edu

Appendix D

Interview Protocol

Introduction

Hello and thank you for participating in this interview. My name is Derek Terrell and I am a doctoral candidate with UCLA's Educational Leadership Program. You have been selected to speak with me today because you are a current college advising staff member at a high school that participates in the Dallas County Promise Program and are in a position that works very closely with high school students and their college preparedness. I wanted to hear your perspective and understand your experience working with students and families as they are introduced to the Dallas County Promise Program. My research study aims to examine and understand the impacts of the Dallas County Promise Program. In addition, I hope to understand the role that implementation of the program plays and what impact--if any--it may have on high school students related to college access and college choice. This interview will be recorded. Do you verbally agree to allow me to record the session?

A. Background and Implementation

1. What is your current title and how long have you worked in your current position?
2. Can you tell me about your school and the students with whom you work?
3. How did you come to work or be involved with the Dallas County Promise Program?
4. What are your responsibilities in relation to the Dallas County Promise Program?
5. What resources are provided to you and other counselors, teachers, and administration to promote the Dallas County Promise program?
    a. Follow-up/Probing Questions
        i. Are these resources sufficient or appropriate?
        ii. What do you wish you had more of?
        iii. What are some of the challenges to implementation?
6. When and how are students and families first introduced to the Dallas County Promise Program?
7. What types of activities are held, or kinds of services are provided for your high school students and families to promote the Dallas County Promise?

a. Follow-up/Probing Questions
    i. College-going messaging
    ii. Financial literacy/Financial aid
    iii. College choice

8. You mentioned that you provide *x, y, z* activities for students and families, what has been their response to these activities and services?

Thank you. Now, let's move onto some questions that look into the potential impacts of Dallas County Promise Program in more detail

B. Program Outcomes/Impact Questions

1. What do you understand to be the specific objectives and intended outcomes of the Dallas County Promise Program?
2. To what extent are each of these objectives and intended outcomes being achieved?
    a. Follow-up/Probing Questions
        i. How do you know these are being achieved or not?
        ii. Are there any differences in the number of students wanting to go to community college now? How so?
3. Describe for me a student who has benefitted from this program and what you've seen happen with that student.
4. Now could you tell me about a student who might not have benefitted or not as much, and why?
5. Are you in contact with any of your students who became Dallas County Promise Scholars?
    a. Follow-up/Probing Questions
        i. What have they shared about their experience as a Promise Scholar?
        ii. What has their experience been like with the supports and services provided through the program?

C. Wrap-up/Closing

1. Is there anything else you would like to share that would help me to better understand

how the Dallas County Promise Program is being implemented in your school and how it has impacted your students and their college choice?

2. If you had to offer any suggestions to improve the Dallas County Promise Program, what would those be?

This concludes the interview. Do you have any questions for me? Would you prefer an Amazon or Starbucks gift card?

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