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Sponsorship and Appreciation

The *AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice* would like to thank AASA, The School Superintendents Association, and particularly AASA's Leadership Network and Valerie Truesdale, for their ongoing sponsorship of the *Journal*. AASA Leadership Network, the School Superintendents Association's professional learning arm, drives educational leaders' success, innovation and growth, focused on student-centered, equity-focused, future-driven education.

We also offer special thanks to Brian Osborne, Lehigh University, with assistance from Kenneth Mitchell, Manhattanville University, in selecting the articles that comprise this professional education journal and lending sound editorial comments.

The unique relationship between research and practice is appreciated, recognizing the mutual benefit to those educators who conduct the research and seek out evidence-based practice and those educators whose responsibility is to carry out the mission of school districts in the education of children.

Without the support of AASA, Brian Osborne and Kenneth Mitchell, the *AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice* would not be possible.

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A word of thanks …

As the AASA assistant editor for the *AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice* for several years, and having worked with three editors, I would like to offer a few words of thanks to Ken Mitchell who has served as the editor of the Journal for nearly 10 years. Before Ken, it was my pleasure to work with Chris Tienken and before Chris, Fred Dembowski. Each brought his own expertise and talent to this open-source Journal, growing it year by year.

It is especially bittersweet to bid farewell to Ken who had, from the start, thoughts on how to escalate this professional publication for researchers and practitioners alike. As a former school administrator completing his public school career as a superintendent in South Orangetown CSD, NY, he moved to the faculty of Manhattanville University where he was able to see the value for readers from both higher education and public schools. Over time, he began to look for common and contemporary themes for each issue that were reflected in the articles submitted for publication. He then sent these articles to the Board of Editors, blind copied, for input and revision if needed. The final touch in each issue was reflected in his editorials that aligned with the theme of the issue.

Ken, your intellect, patience and natural curiosity and understanding of research that served to guide school leaders in the challenges of the day will be missed. You are appreciated and we, at AASA, wish you the best as you move on to new ventures.

And with this farewell we welcome Brian Osborne who joins us to lend his expertise to the ongoing excellence of this publication. Brian has served as a school administrator in New York state with his last position as superintendent of the City School District of New Rochelle. In 2019 Brian was recruited to join the faculty at Lehigh University in a multi-faceted department of education position, so like Ken, he has also seen both sides of research and practice. You will learn more of Brian's approach and commitment to research as you read "Transitions" in this issue. We look forward to your contributions, Brian, and the stamp you will put on the Journal. Welcome!

Barbara Dean
Assistant Editor

Transitions

Brian G. Osborne, EdD

It is an honor to be the new editor of the *AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice*. I commend Ken Mitchell for elevating the Journal to a high standard of relevant research that informs leadership practice. Ken's leadership as superintendent was a model for me some years ago when I was a new superintendent, and it is with gratitude that I now follow him as editor of a journal that aims to support effective district leadership.

After 27 years in public education, including twelve as a superintendent, I shifted my personal and professional mission. As a superintendent, I was committed to providing effective, change-oriented leadership that improved opportunities and outcomes for all students. The adjustment away from providing district leadership directly was difficult for me. I missed the agency, the pressure, and knowing that my daily actions were moving the districts I led closer to the systems that our students truly need.

Over time, I settled into my professorial role and developed my current personal and professional mission: to identify, prepare, and support leaders who can be positive change agents for all students in the often-challenging arena of public education. Through teaching aspiring leaders, supervising internships, and providing executive coaching, I have found a new calling as a nurturer of aspiring leaders and a thought partner to current leaders.

At Lehigh, I serve as a professor of practice, a faculty position created to recognize the potential contributions of practitioners with a career record in educational leadership to the work of higher education.

I am surrounded by colleagues who are research faculty, whose contributions lie in their acumen for examining evidence and using scientific methods to make meaning out of the observed data and phenomena that occur in schools and the outcomes that result. Lehigh is designated as "R1" according to the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, which means that it produces the highest level of research output, so, as you can imagine, these colleagues approach their work with an impressive level of seriousness and dedication.

As I reflect on the stages of my career in light of my new mission and circumstances, one of the major lessons I have learned is informed by the approach of the research faculty. My earlier doctoral-level training at Harvard's Urban Superintendents Program prepared me well for the demands of the multi-faceted position and solidified my sense of purpose and urgency. It also taught me about the importance of data-based decision-making and the use of scientific evidence.

In the job itself, however, the leadership imperative often means making difficult decisions in real-time without having complete information. I valued being led by my moral commitments and accrued experience. I wonder now, though, to what extent did my leadership decisions align with the best available

evidence? Would a rigorous research study have validated my leadership moves or cast them in some doubt?

What would my leadership and decision-making process have looked like if I had invested more time immersing myself in the latest research findings (and where would that time have come from?) or partnered closely with a research institution? High-quality research over the past couple of years suggests that there may have been better approaches to some of the core work in the districts that I led.

These reflections align closely with my current personal and professional mission because part of preparing and supporting leaders to be the positive change agents that our nation's children need them to be includes arming those leaders with the knowledge and skills to be effective users of research. The *AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice* is a tool for doing just that. As an educational leadership community, it provides us with the opportunity to sift through emerging research and determine together what will be most accessible and immediately practical to those who are leading schools and school districts.

The Journal is disseminated widely and regularly in a readable quarterly publication intended for us, those who have chosen to dedicate our professional lives to strengthening public schools and expanding opportunities for our students.

There is a role for you in this endeavor to ensure that the best research informs our collective leadership. Read the Journal! Share it with a colleague or a particular article with those on your team. Encourage the researchers you know to submit their articles. Consider becoming a reviewer to contribute to the vital work of shaping what research reaches our practitioner colleagues.

My gratitude to you for your work and commitment to our nation's great kids and to the vital role of public education in our shared and valued democracy. And thank you for reading the Journal!

Editorial

Brian G. Osborne, EdD
Editor
AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice
Fall 2025

Bridging the Gap Between Research and Practice in the Pursuit of Equity

The Fall issue of the *AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice* features two articles that reflect the Journal's central purpose of bringing scholars and practitioners into conversation around the most pressing challenges in educational leadership today. Taken together, they illuminate how educational inequities persist in both the structures that govern leadership roles and the systems designed to serve our most vulnerable students. Just as importantly, they offer research-informed strategies for addressing these inequities.

In their analysis of principal compensation, Buckman and Tran examine salary disparities by race. Drawing on a five-year longitudinal dataset from Georgia, the authors document pay gaps between White principals and their peers of color, even after accounting for factors like experience, school size, and district characteristics. Their findings challenge assumptions about the fairness of education's internal labor market and prompt district leaders to scrutinize their hiring and compensation systems. The study models the kind of scholarship that uses available evidence to surface ways that policies, practices, and structures may unintentionally perpetuate inequity.

In a different vein, but with a similar equity focus, Eklof-Parks, Callahan, and Vogel offer a practical tool for supporting multilingual English learners (ML-ELs) in rural and low-incidence districts that face limited Title III funding, dispersed student populations, and challenged infrastructure.

The authors developed a rubric-based guidance system to help local leaders assess and strengthen their Lau Plans. By translating their research findings into actionable steps, the authors suggest practical ways to bridge the gap between research and leadership.

The articles share a commitment to confronting inequities, whether in the paychecks of school leaders or in the programmatic gaps affecting multilingual learners. Reflective of the purpose of this journal, both studies demonstrate how research can inform leadership at a granular, actionable level. For educational leaders, this means seeking out and applying research that reveals blind spots and informs action. For researchers, this means investigating questions that directly address the lived realities of school and district leadership.

As the new editor of this journal, I see our role as a platform for publishing rigorous research that informs this two-way dialogue between scholarship and leadership practice. The two articles in this issue reflect that mutual responsibility. And they serve as reminders and invitations to all of us working at the intersection of research and practice to pursue equity with both humility and resolve.

Research Article

Do Principals of Color Earn Less? An Examination of the Racial Pay Gap Among a First-time School Principal Cohort

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Abstract

This study examines whether a relationship exists between principals' racial background and pay after accounting for relevant covariates. The study was conducted with a sample of 90 principals (n = 90) from the state of Georgia (United States) over a five-year timeframe (t=5), representing 450 data points. The analysis for the study adjusts for regional wage differences and relevant covariates and employs a mixed-effects regression model to address its research question. Results suggest that early career Principals of Color (POC) earn less than their White counterparts. Findings are interpreted from an equity theory and social dominance orientation perspective.

Key Words

principal pay, principal pay equity, POC, White privilege, compensation

While people of color are often not hired and promoted to school leadership positions (Smith, 2016), research has suggested that even when they are, they often face biases, microaggressions, and even discrimination in their roles (Tran et. al, 2023). One salient area of discrimination that exacerbates the problem of workplace exclusion is pay inequity, especially because salaries represent the economic value the institution places on the personnel. U.S. data suggest that the average White principal earns less than the average principal of color.

For example, in 2017-18, White principals earned an average of $99,400 when compared to Black principals, who earned $101,100, and Hispanic principals who earned $105,100 (Hussar et al., 2020). However, these raw data are purely descriptive and do not account for comparability in other factors such as experience, education, school type, and regional wage differences that influence leadership pay.

If more accurate comparisons reveal that Principals of Color (POC) actually earn less than their White counterparts, these realities not only serve as deterrents from a recruitment perspective for candidates of color but promote turnover for POC as well. Indeed, prior research has suggested that principal pay affects principals' turnover and turnover intention (Young et al., 2010; Tran, 2017), and principal turnover has been linked to lower student achievement (Miller, 2013). Unfortunately, there is a dearth of research on school leadership compensation and even less so on pay inequities across racial groups. As a result, this study seeks to help fill the void by addressing the following question:

> *Is there a relationship between the racial background of first-year principals and their salaries after accounting for relevant covariates?*

Given the interest in diversifying school leadership (Tran et al., 2023), this study targets first-year principals as this stage represents the entry point into the profession when salary offerings are critical for attracting prospective candidates. If starting salaries for POC are disproportionately low, this could deter employment interest from candidates of color. In the state of Georgia, like many conservative southern states, there exist intense political battles, with many legislators and policymakers attacking diversity, equity, and inclusion. As such, many people of color may feel deterred from the principalship due to feeling unwanted.

Prior research has suggested that Black principals, for example, are less likely to be promoted to the principalship relative to their White counterparts (Bailes & Guthery, 2020). Because of this context, the study's focus was placed on the state of Georgia in the United States of America to address the research question. Controlling for a single state also holds constant state-specific nuances that may affect the relationship between principal race and pay (e.g., racial representation in the state).

Per 2021 data from the Governor's Office of Student Achievement, over a quarter of Georgia principals were new to the position, with a slightly higher proportion of new White principals compared to new POC (i.e., 52.8% and 47.2%, respectively) (Flamini & Steed, 2022). What is unknown is how pay is distributed across principal demographics. There are many reasons to suspect that POC may earn less than their White counterparts. For example, research has suggested that teachers of color are disproportionately employed in lower-paying, high-poverty school districts (Ingersoll et al., 2017). If this pattern holds true for principals, then logically, POC would be paid less than their counterparts. Furthermore, even within a district, candidates of color may negotiate their starting salaries differently than their counterparts. The fact that

many principals are paid on salary schedules does not negate this concern, as their placement on salary schedules is often negotiated. Research has suggested that racial differences could influence employers' willingness to negotiate, and this could heavily impact starting salary offerings (Hernandez et al., 2019).

Literature Review

Despite pay and anti-discrimination laws, we continue to see pay disparity between people of different racial backgrounds. For example, according to a report by the Economic Policy Institute (2016), the wage gap between Black and White workers is more prominent today than in 1979, even controlling for education, experience, and locale, with Black women suffering the most significant gap (34.2% less than their White men in 2015) (Wilson & Rodgers, 2016). These types of pay gaps can be seen across the industry.

For example, in the medical and science professions, White males are usually paid substantially more than women and men of color after accounting for degree, rank, and specialty (Dandar & Lautenberger, 2021). From an international perspective, research highlights that the majority of ethnic minority groups in the United Kingdom tend to work in low-paying sector jobs (Joseph Rowntree Foundation Report, 2015). Similarly, South African research reports that the wages of South Africans of color lagged behind White South Africans by more than 20 percent (Salisbury, 2016).

Pay inequity likely results from organizational reproduction of inequality, which perpetuates the same biases and discrimination that undergird inequitable work experiences that people of color experience, ranging from being neglected for hiring and promotional opportunities, as well as biases resulting in micro and macro aggression and other discriminatory treatment (Amir et al., 2020).

In the realm of education, historically discriminatory pay for teachers in the early 1900s explained much of the racial differences in expenditures, especially in the Southern U.S. States, yet at the close of the 20th century, much of the gap closed due to changing labor laws, evolving social attitudes, and the development of a teacher salary schedule (Mango, 1990). Concerning the last point, the teacher salary schedule effectively mitigated much of the discrepancy in teacher pay via a deterministic restriction where experience and education level dictated how much teachers were paid (Tran & Jackson-Smith, 2022). Overall compensation still varied due to differences in whether and where teachers of color were predominately hired (D'amico et al., 2017) and differences in supplemental pay at the school level (Grissom & Keiser, 2011; Viano et al., 2023), but for the most part, it occurred through indirect and subtle mechanism rather than directly.

Salary negotiations are an area ripe and vulnerable to rampant pay discrimination and bias. Grissom et al. (2021), for example, found that gender gaps existed for both base and supplemental pay. While the issue of discrimination in principal pay based on race is less studied, the larger body of pay discrimination scholarship suggests its potential presence.

Case in point, across three studies, Hernandez (2019) found that Black job seekers are penalized if they negotiate higher salary outcomes than their White counterparts, as biased assumptions create expectations that they would negotiate lower salaries instead. To the extent that this same trend exists in the principalship, it represents a potential major barrier to the recruitment and retention of POC into/in the field.

There have been calls to diversify the principalship, given that school leaders are disproportionately White relative to their student body in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Unfortunately, principal demographics are linked to the likelihood of promotion to leadership. For example, Bailes & Guthery (2020) found that holding school and personal characteristics constant, Black Principals have the least likelihood of being promoted and are in assistant principal positions longer than their White counterparts. These represent major barriers to leadership diversification.

From an international perspective, principals in many regions, such as England and South Africa, continue to experience an underrepresentation of Black leaders in schools due to a lack of integration, discrimination, and outright racism (Bush & Moloi, 2007). This finding is particularly unfortunate as racial diversity in principalship has been linked to numerous positive outcomes. For example, principals are more likely to be associated with larger percentages of teachers who racially match with them, and these race matches have been linked with stronger math achievement scores (Bartanen & Grissom, 2023).

In fact, the benefits for students of color, especially for those who are racially matched, are well documented. These outcomes include improved attendance (Meier et al., 2004), test scores (Blazer & Lagos, 2021), and an increased identification of students of color in gifted programs (Grissom et al., 2017). To make matters worse, in an analysis of a nationally representative sample of school principals, Johnston and Young (2019) found that almost 40% of White principals noted they were underprepared to support Black, Latino, and low-income students. From a teacher diversity perspective, teachers who are racially congruent with their principals are more likely to get hired (Bartanen & Grissom, 2021; Grissom & Keiser, 2011), are more likely to earn more supplemental income (e.g., coaching stipends) (Viano et al., 2023), more likely to be satisfied with their job, and leave their position (Grissom & Keiser, 2011; Lindsay & Egalite, 2020).

While the salary gap between a teacher and a principal can be quite substantial, this varies by locale, and for some, the amount is insufficient to compensate for elevated stress and challenging work conditions of the job (Pijanowski & Brady, 2009). Principal pay matters for numerous reasons. First, there is evidence to suggest past research has found that salaries motivate principal movement in the labor market (Papa, 2017; Tran & Buckman, 2017; Tran, 2014). The principal salary offerings can affect principals' reactions to their pay and their sentiments about leaving their schools. Based on results from a structural equation modeling analysis on a sample of California high school principals, Tran (2017) reported that principals' pay satisfaction is influenced by the salaries of their comparative peers (e.g., principals in their district, principals in other districts) and influences their turnover intention.

This is particularly problematic because, on average, principal turnover has been found to be associated with declines in student achievement (Bartanen et al., 2019; Miller, 2013), and principal pay has been linked to student achievement (Young et al., 2010). Moreover, principal turnovers can be financially costly for the districts, with each replacement costing funds that could be spent on other instructional matters in schools (Tran et al., 2018).

Yet, despite our limited understanding of the patterns and trends of principal pay, there is still much that is unknown. For example, Lee and Mao's (2023) systematic review of principal recruitment and selection literature

noted a critical theme of the lack of understanding concerning how to encourage more diversity in school leadership. Assuredly, the disparity in pay between principals of different racial backgrounds, should it exist, would represent a significant barrier that would contribute to the underrepresentation of school leaders from marginalized race groups. This study aims to help advance our knowledge base in this domain.

Theoretical Framework

This study leverages equity theory (see Michener et al., 2004) as an overarching framework for the research. Traditionally, equity theory has been used to examine the ratio of outputs to inputs, with inequities existing when this ratio is less than uniform. From a pay perspective, this suggests someone getting paid less than what they believe their contribution warrants, which results in their reduction of future effort. When equity theory serves as a framework for investigating pay inequity between groups of people, the focus is on differences between ratios for a protected class group and a non-protected class group in a relative comparison rather than examining absolute values. Within this study, the output is the degree of principal pay differences and whether that correlates to differences in principals' race.

Consistent with pay negotiation and discrimination in the past (Hernandez et al., 2019), we also incorporate the theory of social dominance orientation (SDO) (Sidanius et al., 1994) in our framing of the study. Within this study, SDO suggests that people from different backgrounds (i.e., racial demographics) are associated with varying hierarchies of group status. It is theorized that those who are perceived to be a higher status group (e.g., Whites in this study, due to racial bias and stereotypes) will experience better treatment and outcomes (i.e., higher pay in this study). In tandem, equity theory and SDO would predict that White principals will be paid more than POC.

Methodology

Panel data from Georgia (USA) were collected at the principal level across five years for a sample of first-year principals (i.e., a cohort) to address the research question regarding the relationship between principal pay and principal race. By examining a cohort across time (e.g., the 2015 class of new principals' progression for five years) as opposed to analyzing multiple different cohorts (e.g., 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019 classes of new principals), this design allows researchers to clearly isolate the particular nuances and dynamics of the group to better interpret the findings. Additionally, panel data (i.e., longitudinal data) was chosen because it has the advantage of capturing changes over time in outcomes relative to predictors, unlike cross-sectional data, which provides only a snapshot of a single period.

Since this study examined the salaries of traditional public school principals, it did not include principal data at other school types (e.g., private and charter schools). The compensation structures, demographics of students, and achievement data of other types of schools vary from those of public schools, and as a result, comparisons would likely be systematically influenced by those factors, rendering the comparisons not representative. Data obtained at the school level included school characteristics such as the school level, location, socioeconomic status (SES), size, diversity (i.e., percentage of students of color), and district-level variables such as revenue.

Procedure

As the study's focus was on first-year public school principals, the researchers obtained assistant principal and principal data from the Georgia Department of Education (GADOE)

from the 2014 through 2015 academic years (i.e., to capture first-year principals), as well as data from the GADOE, the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA), and the National Center of Education Statistics (NCES) from 2015 through 2019 for school and district data.

This study focused on first-year principals because they represent the entry point into the profession and because of the importance of initial pay for recruitment and the diversity of the principals entering the profession. To identify the first-year principal cohort, the researchers used two GADOE personnel data sets (i.e., 2014 assistant principal and 2015 principal) to locate assistant principals who transitioned from assistant principal to principal between the 2014 and 2015 datasets. Through this process, we acquired complete first-year Georgia principal data for principals starting in 2015.

Other factors that were controlled through research design addressed the relationship between principal effectiveness based on school performance and its impact on principal pay (Boyce & Bowers, 2016; Carlson & Johnson, 2010; Young, 2010). According to Miller (2013), it takes school leaders approximately five years to effectively contribute to evaluative effectiveness measures such as a school's climate, teacher recruitment and retention, and student achievement. Based on the importance of principal effectiveness and the recommended five-year retention threshold necessary for a principal to display effectiveness, we removed newly appointed principals who turned over (i.e., left the principal profession) within their first five years to maintain a consistent baseline for comparison.

A total of 130 principals were identified as the 2015 population of first-year principals by the researchers after considering the criteria for inclusion in this study. Of the 130 new principals identified, only 45 of the principals were POC. As such, 45 White principals were randomly selected from the population to remain in the study to balance the sample's strata racially, rendering a final sample of 45 White principals and 45 POC. This stratified sampling technique, in which groups are balanced for comparison purposes, has been used in similar salary discrimination studies when comparing personnel demographics (see Young, 1999).

Variables and covariates

Covariates were used to account for the confounding influence on the dependent variable to determine the statistical relationship between the independent variable (i.e., principal race) and the dependent variable (i.e., principal salaries). Research has indicated how supervisor race can directly or indirectly influence hiring decisions when analyzed through the theoretical lens of representative bureaucracy (Grissom & Keiser, 2021; Goff et al., 2018). Notably, Grissom and Keiser (2021) and Goff et al. (2018) address the influence of racial congruence and incongruence of district leaders and their subordinates, highlighting that minoritized subordinates often receive more negative effects of racial incongruence (e.g., less pay) than their White counterparts.

As a result, superintendents' race was utilized as a control variable to account for this phenomenon. As noted in Table 1 below, 88 percent of the superintendents in the study identified as White.

The analysis also included promotion type because the literature supports the negotiating power associated with external hires (Tan & Buckman, 2017). Unlike those promoted internally, hiring agents must compete with external labor markets with candidates from other organizations for external hires, often resulting in increased

wages for external recruits. Table 1 indicates that roughly 90% of the sample was promoted internally from assistant principal to principal.

Gender served as a statistical control in the study to account for the potential influence of pay differences between male and female principals. On average, female principals make 1% (i.e., $1,000) less than males, and this gap increases when individual characteristics are included (see Grissom et al., 2021). Data from Table 1 indicates that over 61% of the principals in the sample were female, and roughly 39% of the same were males.

Teachers and leaders often must acquire advanced degrees to achieve higher pay and promotion in education positions (Buckman et al., 2016; Buckman et al., 2017; Tran, 2017). In the state of Georgia, the minimum degree level to receive leadership certification to serve as a practicing administrator (i.e., assistant/vice principal) is at the master's degree level; however, to serve as a school principal, a specialist degree is required.

Table 1 highlights that 13.8% of the sample were appointed to the position with only a master's degree. This finding indicates that these participants were rewarded a provisional certification and needed to seek a specialist degree to remain principals. Over 62% of the sample have specialist degrees, and 24% of the sample have doctorate degrees.

Along with degree level, the years of professional experience variable is identified as a form of human capital, can influence principals' pay, and has served as statistical control across pay studies in education (Tran & Buckman, 2017; Grissom et al., 2021). Since all principals in the study were first-year principals, years of experience were defined as total years of education experience (i.e., assistant principal experience is captured in total years of experience).

Table 2 indicates the average years of experience for the sample of first-year principals were approximately 19 years. Schooling level (i.e., Elementary, Middle, High, and Combination) was considered in our model because a school's grade level is linked to its principal's pay (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2008; Tran, 2017; Tran & Buckman, 2017). More pointedly, research has indicated that principals at the elementary level earn less than middle school principals, while middle school principals earn less than high school principals. The sample consisted of 57.8% elementary school principals, 26.4% middle school principals, 14.4% high school principals, and 1.3% combination school principals (See Table 1).

Similar to the school level variable, school locale (i.e., city, rural, suburban, and town) can significantly predict principal pay. For instance, Young et al. (2010) identified that school location influences principal pay; for example, rural school districts purportedly pay less than non-rural districts. The disparity in pay is related to the lower property taxes and labor market wages associated with rural contexts (Tran, 2018) relative to their urban and suburban counterparts. Relatedly, when analyzing pay differences among principals based on gender, Grissom et al. (2021) accounted for school locale, recognizing significant pay differences between the groups.

Our study accounts for locale to address all other geographic pay differences not captured within the labor market via the Comparative Wage Index. School locale was based on the defined classification prescribed by the National Center for Education Statistics (i.e., City, Rural, Suburban, and Town).

Table 1 below shows there were 84 city schools, 156 rural schools, 207 suburban schools, and 3 town schools in the sample.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics: Frequency

Categorical Variables	N	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Principal Race			
White	225	50	50
POC (People of Color)	225	50	100
Superintendent Race			
White	396	88	88
POC	54	12	100
Promotion Type			
Internal	405	90	90
External	45	10	100
Principal Gender			
Female	275	61.1	61.1
Male	175	38.9	100
Principal Degree Level			
Masters	62	13.8	13.8
Specialist	280	62.2	76.0
Doctorate	108	24.0	100
School Level			
Elementary	260	57.8	57.8
Middle	119	26.4	84.2
High	65	14.4	98.7
Combination	6	1.3	100

School Locale			
City	84	18.7	18.7
Rural	156	34.7	53.3
Suburban	207	46	99.3
Town	3	0.7	100

Note: N represents totals across 5 years of data. To interpret annual averages, divide N by 5

The researchers captured school poverty via the School Neighborhood Poverty Estimate provided by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). This estimate relies on household economic data from the U.S. Census and public school locations. Tran and Buckman (2017) highlights that schools with large concentrations of students in poverty are often perceived as having challenging working environments and conditions, which may require higher salaries to attract principal candidates.

Similar to the percentage of students in poverty, research indicates that increased percentages of students of color in a school are also perceived as having challenging working conditions and environments, making it difficult to attract principal candidates, which requires increased principal salaries to recruit (Levin & Bradley, 2019). Therefore, school poverty and the percentage of students of color were accounted for in this study. Table 2 below denotes the average school poverty estimate and students of color for the sample were roughly 287.2 and 67%, respectively. Although these factors are often related, there was no instance of multicollinearity (i.e., VIF= 1.2756 and 1.744, respectively).

School size, as defined by student enrollment, was accounted for because schools with larger student bodies often necessitate more principals' responsibilities than smaller schools (Rose & Sengupta, 2007). Further, principals who work at larger schools often supervise, develop, and evaluate more employees than principals from smaller schools, thus justifying additional compensation. The average school size was around 798 students ranging from 97 students to 3,712 students (see Table 2).

Considering the influence of student achievement on principal pay (Boyce & Bowers, 2016), school performance was analyzed and captured using Georgia's College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) provided by the Georgia Department of Education. The researchers used the overall school score, which scales from 0 to 100 points. Factors such as content mastery, progress, closing gaps, readiness, and graduation rate (high schools only) are determinants used to compute each school's achievement score. Table 2 highlights the average school performance score in the sample was 73.61.

Independent variable

Due to salary discrepancies found in negotiations (Wade, 2001) and the historical nature of pay discrimination in the southern U.S., Principals' race was the independent variable for this study. As noted in Table 1, there were a total of 90 principals in the sample

(45 White; 45 POC). Given the constraint of a limited number of sizable racial categories, all non-White racial groups were collectively referred to as "Principals of Color (POC)." The independent variable was dummy coded whereby White principals were coded as 0, and POC was coded as 1.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics: Central Tendency

Continuous Variables	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Dev.
Years of Experience	450	38	0	38	19.32	6.19
Poverty	450	685	93	778	287.28	143.66
School Size	450	3615	97	3712	798.25	464.00
Students of Color	450	91.6	8.4	100	66.98	29.72
Revenue	450	2.3507E+9	4308000.00	2.3550E+9	719553295	666057150
School Performance Index	450	70.4	29.6	100	73.61	12.62
Principal Salary	450	94849.00	52964.00	147813.00	99782.10	13072.17
Principal Adjusted Salary	450	91468.62	66789.40	158258.03	109057.17	15415.67

Dependent variable

Principals' baseline salaries and principal's salaries adjusted for geographic labor markets served as the dependent variables for this study.

Specifically, the Georgia Department of geographic labor markets, salary data was then adjusted with the Comparable Wage Index for Teachers (CWIFT), developed by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), to ensure accurate financial comparisons across geographic regions.

Calculation-wise, principal salaries were divided by the CWI for their district (Taylor, 2006) to compute the adjustment. Education provided salary data. Salary data included total wage (i.e., baseline and administrative supplement) without the cost of fringe benefits. Because salary offerings differ based on wages associated with different

Results

This study utilized two Restricted Maximum Likelihood (REML) mixed-effects multiple regression models that addressed both fixed effects and random effects variables (respectively) to address the research questions.

As there are instances of multiple principals serving in the same school system, the researchers chose a mixed effects model to address principal nesting at the school system level.

School system served as a random effect variable to address the variance of the intercepts across groups (i.e., districts); all other variables served as fixed effect variables as they remained constant across observations.

This approach was taken because it accounted for the statistical dependency resulting from nested data and ensured that estimates of the standard errors associated with the regression coefficients were unbiased (O'Dwyer & Parker, 2014).

This study found significant pay differences between White principals and POC, even after accounting for covariates. Findings from model 1 in Table 3 below highlight that POC received significantly lower salaries compared to their White counterparts (b= -3483.31; $p \leq .001$). This can be interpreted as, on average, POC makes $3,483. 31 less than their White counterparts.

The results remained, even after adjusting for regional variations in wages and salaries (b= -3679.05; $p \leq .01$); see Table 3, Model 2), to which POC earned $3,679.05 less than White principals.

Across both models, other statistically significant variables included principal degree level, principal years of experience, school size, school level, percentage of students of color, promotion type, and school performance. Unique to model 1, principal gender, school locale, and district revenue were found to be statistically significant; however, when principal salaries were adjusted in model 2, these variables failed to remain statistically significant, indicating that changes in size and directionality of the coefficients may be due to chance.

Table 3

Mixed Effects Regression Models of Principal Pay Equity

Fixed Effects Variables	(1) Estimates and Standard of Error	(2) Salary Estimates and Standard of Error
Intercept	79299.42***	94467.71***
	(3955.16)	(4849.58)

Principal Race	-3483.31***	-3679.05**
	(1028.24)	(1296.96)
Superintendent Race	3789.39	4455.77
	(2568.04)	(3178.43)
Principal Gender	2288.59**	1789.80+
	(763.62)	(964.34)
Principal Degree Level	3267.34***	3594.24***
	(570.07)	(719.78)
Principal Yrs. of Experience	469.82***	472.14***
	(60.06)	(75.85)
Poverty	-3.72	-3.61
	(2.37)	(2.99)
School Size	8.09***	8.60***
	(.7686)	(.9728)
School Level	1890.17***	2241.77***
	(500.53)	(632.66)
School Locale	-4464.72*	-3390.14
	(2083.68)	(2450.26)
Students of Color	-53.08**	-63.89*
	(20.23)	(25.48)
Promotion Type (External)	4317.94***	4198.80**
	(1179.88)	(1483.57)
Total Revenue	.0000***	.0000+
	(.0000)	(.0000)

School Performance Index	-111.79***	-117.43***
	(27.69)	(35.03)
AY 2019	7941.93***	9477.10***
	(865.08)	(1083.88)
AY 2018	7144.66***	8282.13***
	(777.50)	(979.22)
AY 2017	6044.77***	7319.45***
	(741.90)	(938.09)
AY 2016	2973.39***	4132.40***
	(709.37)	(898.67)
Random Effects Variable		
School System	83379813.3	112954248
	(19056479.8)	(26011999.6)

Note. N= 450. Standard of error appears in parentheses. Model 1 dependent variable (salary); Model 2 dependent variable (adjusted salary).

+ $p \leq .10$ *$p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$

Discussion and Conclusion

This study found evidence to suggest that POC may be receiving less pay than their White counterparts after accounting for a host of covariates. The findings are consistent with the theories undergirding equity pay theory and SDO, highlighting inequity in pay via race differences in the predicted direction of the theories.

Coupled with our findings, the former theory suggests a lack of pay equity between POC and their White counterparts, and the latter theory provides a possible explanation as to why White principals would earn higher salaries after accounting for the various covariates. Specifically, because Whites are privileged in school leadership and education in general (Adkins-Sharif, 2021), inequity in pay manifests because of the perceived lack of status (and therefore value) of POC relative to White school principals.

This can result in unconscious bias in the compensation process when assessing the market value of individual school leaders from different backgrounds. Some scholars, such as Bonds and Inwood (2016), make an argument from a global perspective that the issue is beyond *White privilege* but rather is rooted in

White supremacy, which emphasizes White domination of material production and dehumanization that is rooted in institutional practices and processes such as pay.

The results also highlighted significant findings for the predictive power of several covariates that were expected to influence pay in the direction they were found to (e.g., principal degree level, experience, school size, school level, percentage of students of color, and promotion type (external)). One variable that seemed somewhat surprising was the negative coefficient associated with school performance.

A theory of why this may occur is because of the "combat pay" philosophy underlying low-performing schools, where a school that has a lower performance score may need to pay higher salaries to attract principals because of its correlated poorer working conditions.

There are several caveats associated with interpreting the results. First, the study focuses only on one Southeastern state. That said, the study does rely on a statewide database of a set of a population (i.e., all new principals) from a given year (2015) to acquire the cohort sample and follow those who did not leave the profession for five years.

Of course, with this specific sampling frame, principals who depart the profession or the state are not captured. Additionally, as 2015 first-year principals were identified using the 2014 assistant principal dataset, individuals who became principals without prior experience as assistant principals (a situation that is more likely to occur in rural or public charter schools) or 1st year principals new to the state were not included in the data.

This limitation is not trivial, as the study utilized a sample of 1st-year principals, and that sample size was large enough to maintain adequate statistical power to produce accurate and generalizable findings for this particular group.

The findings should be interpreted with these limitations in mind; however, given the larger number of data points in the sample (90 principals over five years, representing 450 data points), the care of analysis (e.g., adjusting for regional wages, adjusting for relevant covariates, relying on a mixed-effects regression model), the global relevance of the study's topic of school leadership pay equity, and the extreme dearth of research on the issue, this study makes a major contribution to scholarship in advancing our understanding about an important aspect of education leadership and administration.

Future research should examine whether other states and countries observe the same pay inequities as the ones identified in this study. If so, a deeper qualitative focus should interrogate why these pay inequities occur and whether the theory of SDO is supported by the narrative shared by the pay decision-makers and school principals who receive the compensation.

As K-12 schools evaluate their compensation systems, pay disparities by factors such as gender, race, and other protected classes highlighted by anti-discrimination agencies such as the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and the European Commission should be examined and interrogated.

To further address the issue of racial inequity in pay, district leaders should continue to evaluate their compensation structure, evaluate their standardized factors for pay negotiations, and engage in discussions to determine if their compensation practices have biases that put leaders of color at a

disadvantage. Pay equity is not the only factor affecting the dearth of diversity of leadership; but pay inequity is a major factor that sustains the scarcity. As a result, it should be better understood, identified, and directly addressed.

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Evidence-Based Practice

Lau Plans and Rural ML-EL Education: Self-Assessment as a Tool to Support Educational Equity

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Abstract

Over the past three decades, the K-12 multilingual English learner (ML-EL) population has grown both numerically and geographically; over three-quarters of public schools now enroll ML-EL students. Districts new to serving ML-ELs often struggle to develop the systems, structures, and policies necessary to comply with federal guidelines governing EL education. As researchers and practitioners working in a largely rural context, we were motivated to develop a tool to guide our state's "new-to-EL-education" leaders in developing sound, effective, evidence-based systems and structures for their EL programs. In this essay, we present a free, openly accessible tool developed to guide district and EL leaders in creating and building the infrastructure necessary to ensure an equitable, effective education for ML-EL students.

Key Words

Lau plan, multilingual, English learner, Title III, ESSA, educational equity, rural

Introduction

Over the past three decades, the K-12 multilingual English learner (ML-EL) population has grown both numerically and geographically. As of 2015, seventy-eight percent[1] of US schools served ML-EL students and increasingly, ML-EL students are enrolling in rural schools and districts (Lee & Hawkins, 2015; Lichter, 2012). As the numbers of ML-EL students and families increase in rural areas, these districts and their leaders often struggle to provide adequate educational support as required by federal EL policy. As researchers and practitioners who work with ML-EL students, their families, and the districts that serve them, we focus on what we refer to as *low EL-incidence* schools and districts—those that traditionally enroll relatively few ML-EL students (Coady, 2020; Mavrogordato et al., 2021). In these cases, ML-EL students are frequently spread across many square miles, multiple grade levels, and several school sites. We argue that low EL-incidence districts sit at the heart of a perfect storm where (1) limited interaction between rural districts and state/federal government systems, (2) sparse numbers of ML-EL students, and (3) few practical tools to guide the provision of services converge to produce a context in which it is challenging at best to comply with federal EL education guidelines. In this manuscript, we present an evidence-based Lau Plan Guidance Tool[2] (Appendix A), designed to facilitate the development and enactment of districts' strategic planning for ML-EL students. While we designed this tool with rural districts in mind, ideally it will prove equally valuable to denser urban and suburban districts as well, and ultimately, to any district serving ML-EL students.

Before we begin, however, a brief note on terminology that may be relevant to you and your district. We follow the lead of Bartlett et al. (2024) and Mavrogordato et al. (In Press) and use the term ML-EL for the following reason. Federal education policy uses the term English learner (EL) to describe the subset of multilingual learner (ML) students entitled to language assistance (EL) programs and services to allow them to fully engage in mainstream content area instruction. While ML is preferable to EL for its asset-based orientation, it also encompasses students who are neither need, nor are legally entitled to EL programs and services (i.e., former ELs, native English speakers in dual language bilingual programs, and MLs who entered schools already English proficient). In the quest for clarity, we use the term ML-EL to specify the subset of ML students who are eligible for EL services.

A Brief History: Ensuring EL Educational Equity in Low-EL Incidence Contexts

Over two decades ago, the reauthorization of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA, 1965) as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) seemed to prioritize funding for, and subsequently, research and policy interest in urban education. NCLB's focus on urban, low-income contexts would ultimately shift attention and resources away from learners and learning in rural contexts (Eppley, 2009; Jimerson, 2005). Historically, few rural districts have had the resources—human or otherwise—to develop comprehensive EL programs and services for ML families (Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016; Lee & Hawkins, 2015). It was only with the onset of the new immigrant diaspora in the late 1990s and early 2000s that the ML-EL population in rural districts begin to grow steadily (Coady, 2020; Marichal, 2021), highlighting the need for such services. Few, if any, school or district leadership programs prepare educational leaders for the specific demands of meeting ML-EL students

[1] https://www2.ed.gov/datastory/el-characteristics/index.html#two

[2] https://www.oakbridgeconsultingllc.com/tools

linguistic civil rights (Callahan et al., 2019); our work here is one effort to provide support and guidance in an easily digestible way for district new to (or not so new to) enrolling ML-EL students.

Even though rural ML-EL enrollment continues to grow, adequate, much less equitable dispersion of resources to low-EL incidence contexts presents a considerable challenge to many states. In our small state, Vermont, one of three states that receive the federal small state minimum[3] Title III allocation, the state has determined that districts will receive Title III funds only if their ML-EL count exceeds fifty identified students. This number allows for the per pupil amount, either in district or as part of a consortium, to meet the federal requirement for a $10K minimum subgrant. With the cap on small state funding, should a new district meet the threshold of fifty students, it would likely shift the allocation amounts per student such that the number of students required to meet the minimum $10K grant would increase. As of Fall 2024, only six (6) school districts in Vermont qualified for Title III subgrants.

Most low EL-incidence districts can only receive Title III funds if they are part of a consortium which, while important for networking and resource-sharing presents additional challenges as well (Bartlett et al., 2024; Yettick et al., 2014). In our work, we frequently find that district leaders and EL coordinators in low EL-incidence contexts struggle to provide adequate services for their ML-EL students, spread as they are across schools and grade levels in districts that span –quite literally— thousands of square miles. We work with district and EL leaders who endeavor to not only provide rich, appropriate services for their ML-EL students but also welcome new ML families into rural areas.

As practitioners and researchers working in and with rural communities, we note that new immigrants often revitalize rural communities in the United States (Carr et al., 2012; Lichter & Johnson, 2020). An influx of immigrant-origin ML families in rural areas has the potential to address many challenges posed by population decline, replenishing a depleted workforce, and bringing youth and children into aging communities. Between 2010 and 2020, US census data showed a 20% increase in racial diversity in rural communities (Johnson & Lichter, 2022), some of which can be attributed to the influx of immigrant-origin ML populations. Ideally, district efforts to improve EL services and educational equity in low-incidence contexts will facilitate the positive, productive integration of these ML families into their new communities.

Shelter in the Storm: Making Federal EL Policy Accessible and Digestible

Rural districts often lack the resources needed to adequately provide EL services to their students; low ML-EL numbers often preclude rural districts from qualifying for federal Title III funding and state EL funding may be minimal at best. At the same time, many state legislatures have moved to local control of categorical funding, wherein state and local EL funds are no longer earmarked solely for the provision of supplemental EL services (Lavadenz et al., 2019; Sugarman, 2016), their spending left to the discretion of district leaders. Further complicating the matter, the parents and guardians of ML-EL students in these contexts are often isolated and not fully aware of the rights afforded to them, much less how to advocate to ensure their children's linguistic and academic needs are met (Coady, 2020; Marichal, 2021). Rural districts are often loosely connected to federal and state government systems, such that educators in these contexts may not even be aware that they are out of compliance with federal and state EL education mandates (Hautala et al., 2018). In our own work, we have observed

[3] 20 U.S.C 6821: https://oese.ed.gov/files/2020/10/title-iii-mod-3-ppt-notes-508.pdf

that district and EL leaders in rural, low-incidence contexts often lack easy access to federal and state guidance that could support them in ensuring educational equity for their ML-ELs. Our work is an effort to provide some of that support; in the following paragraphs we briefly review sixty years of EL education policy as it relates to the Lau plans currently required of every public school district that enrolls ML-EL students.

In the mid-1960's, President Johnson launched his plan for *The Great Society* with a focus on public education (Zeitz, 2019). A cornerstone of Johnson's efforts was passage of the first federal education policy, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA, 1965) followed by the passage of the Bilingual Education Act (BEA, 1968). Congress quickly incorporated language from the BEA into ESEA as Title VII. Title VII (later Title III under NCLB) called attention to the distinct linguistic and academic needs of students learning English as a new language alongside math, science, history, and the other content areas (Gándara, 2015). While the seminal Supreme Court decision in *Lau v. Nichols (1974)* required all districts to provide ML-EL identified students with adequate support to learn in English, it would take nearly a decade before federal guidelines would begin to emerge. Early in the next decade, the federal Fifth District Court ruled in *Castañeda v. Pickard (1981)* that districts must: (1) provide EL services grounded in educational theory, (2) adequately implement these services, and (3) evaluate the effectiveness of their programs. Federal policymakers then adopted Castañeda's three prongs into the EEOA (Gándara, 2015). Castañeda's guidelines are now evidenced in the US Department of Education's General Education Provision Act, Section 427[4], which requires every district enrolling ML-ELs to develop a *Lau Plan*.

Ideally designed collaboratively with community stakeholders and approved by the school board, a *Lau Plan* outlines the district's educational theory, approach, and goals for the EL program, including procedures to safeguard the rights of ML-EL students and their families. A robust *Lau Plan* provides a solid foundation for district and EL leaders who hope to ensure educational equity for ML-ELs. With little, if any, funding-based accountability, low EL-incidence districts are left to develop and provide EL services in isolation, often with few resources and little guidance. In the following section, we describe our multi-faceted Lau plan guidance tool, its' origins and alignment to federal guidelines, and later how district and EL leaders can apply it in their own contexts.

A Practical Tool for Practitioners Developing EL Programs

In 2017, the federal Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA) published the EL toolkit[5], which offers an overview of the research and theory grounding the ten key elements of districts' required *Lau Plans.* In our collaborative network of rural district and EL leaders eager to support their ML-EL students, we identified a need to synthesize and streamline information about not only the federal mandates and policies regarding EL services but also best practices for serving ML-ELs.

In response to Coady's (2020) call for practical tools to support rural low-EL incidence districts, Eklof-Parks began developing this tool with a growth model approach. This lens suggests that as district

[4] https://oese.ed.gov/files/2021/10/General-Education-Provisions-Act-GEPA-Requirements-Section-427-ED-GEPA-427-Form.pdf

[5] https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oela/english-learner-toolkit/index.html

leaders use this tool to design systems and structures to support ML-ELs, they will begin a cycle of continuous improvement (Lewis, 2015) ultimately leading to meeting, if not exceeding compliance. Network-wide use of rubrics can establish specific criteria for growth while leaving room for creativity—essential to program building when resources are limited (Fine & Pryiomka, 2020; Robinson & Cook, 2017). We offer the Lau plan guidance tool in the spirit of growth for districts, educators, and ML-EL students alike.

At the start of her doctoral studies, Eklof-Parks noted a lack of user-friendly tools to empower districts to survey their EL current offerings and identify the systems, structures, and policies that they might develop further. Her efforts involved multiple rounds of educator and researcher dialogue, feedback, and revisions. Over the past year, our team has requested, received, and incorporated feedback on the tool from scholars, colleagues, and educational leaders nationally. The OELA EL Toolkit breaks down the ten most critical aspects of a Lau Plan; here, we align each rubric row with one toolkit chapter and offer a secondary rubric to guide districts in both addressing federal compliance guidelines and adopting evidence-based practices. In addition, we add one introductory 'row' reviewing essential federal EL policy to offer district and EL leaders not only a concise overview of federal guidelines but also a map to ensuring educational equity for ML-EL students, one element at a time.

Rows: Program Buckets

As noted above, the initial or launching rubric itself consists of eleven rather than ten rows; the first row presents an overview of the federal policies that govern various aspects of EL education, to serve as an easily accessible resource to reference as district and EL leaders consider the different systems, structures, and policies that will comprise their Lau plan. Each subsequent row (two through eleven) of the launching rubric aligns to one of the ten EL toolkit chapters. The tool's initial rubric acts as a landing page – a space where district and EL leaders can determine, comprehensively, how to strengthen their EL programs overall, identifying both strengths and areas for growth.

The second row of the initial rubric aligns to the first chapter in the EL Toolkit, (1) identification of potential ML-EL students. Subsequent rows and chapters then cover, (2) providing ML-EL identified students with a language assistance/EL program, (3) staffing and supporting an EL program, (4) providing ML-EL identified students with equal access to curricular and extracurricular programs, (5) creating an inclusive environment and avoiding unnecessary segregation of ML-EL identified students, (6) addressing ML-EL identified students with disabilities, (7) serving ML-EL identified students' who opt out of EL programs or services, (8) monitoring and exiting ML-EL identified students from EL programs and services, (9) evaluating EL program effectiveness, and (10) meaningful communication with parents and guardians of ML-EL identified students.

After considering their existing systems, structures, and policies, with the launching rubric, district and EL leaders might then select a specific area or row where they feel most confident in the strength of the existing infrastructure. This process allows EL and district leaders to identify both the areas that, with minimal effort, will quickly either meet or exceed federal compliance guidelines as well as those areas that may require greater time, effort, and/ or attention. If an ML-EL advisory group exists, district and EL leaders might prefer to initiate efforts on or around a certain program element prescribed in the initial rubric. Regardless of how district and EL leaders choose to approach the rubric it allows the user to focus on one area at a time and make the process as manageable as possible.

After selecting a target area for focus and development, the user(s) will then follow the link embedded in the title cell to a secondary rubric for that focal area. All rows and secondary rubrics incorporate hyperlinks linking to relevant research and include relevant citations.

Columns: Performance Levels

The tool's columns allow users to determine their context's perceived performance level, with an eye ahead to greater inclusion. Column headers run from left to right in order of growth, beginning with (1) Entering, (2) Emerging, (3) Developing, (4) Competent, and (5) Exceeding. While competent indicates full compliance with federal EL policy, the multi-tiered Lau Plan rubrics extend to incorporate evidence-based systems, structures, and policies proven to support ML-EL identified students and their families in column (5) exceeding. Most importantly, the rubrics ensure multiple access points for districts in any stage of receiving and serving ML-EL students.

Secondary Rubric

Introduction: The federal laws and policies rubric helps the end user determine whether existing systems, structures, and policies in their district comply with the spirit and goals of federal EL education laws, policies, and procedures. This secondary rubric offers the practitioner an overview documenting how various federal court decisions, laws, and policies underlie and inform the provision of EL services and supports. Importantly, this page directs the user to the source documents that substantiate the federal requirements and regulations.

The intake/registration rubric prompts the user to consider the existing protocols that define their district's ML-EL intake, assessment, and registration process. This secondary rubric details all students' right to a public education, supports during intake and registration, the administration of state and district home language survey(s), as well as workflow, screening, data collection, and placement for new ML-EL students.

The EL program development row of the launching rubric guides the user to identify goals for improving services with a focus on selecting an evidence based EL program, the first prong of Castañeda (1984). In particular, the related secondary rubric addresses the provision of an evidence-based instructional program, effective program design and evaluation, as well as the identification of unique ML-EL subgroups (i.e., newcomers, long-term ELs) and the provision of services for these students.

The staffing and supporting an EL program row of the rubric guides the user to consider the systems in place to ensure that their district employs adequately trained and qualified EL staff and offers the resources necessary to support the academic and linguistic needs of the district's ML-EL students. The secondary rubric contains guidelines regarding program administration, qualified EL educators, EL program staffing, instructional resources, provision of modified instruction, and professional development for both EL and content area educators.

The next row focuses on providing ELs equal access to curricular and extracurricular programs. The secondary rubric focuses first on how to access OCR data to ensure equitable access to curricular and extracurricular programming. It then addresses equitable curricular access and rigor, the key principles for EL instruction, alignment to college- and career-ready standards, and finally, serving gifted and talented ML-ELs.

The sixth row of the rubric, creating an inclusive environment and avoiding unnecessary segregation addresses district protocols regarding awareness and support of diversity and prevention of harassment, hazing, and bullying for ML-ELs. The associated secondary rubric includes support for an inclusive vision supportive of diversity, appropriate program placement, curriculum, assessment and monitoring, staffing, and communication.

The next row addresses the education of ML-EL students identified with disabilities. Here, the rubric prompts the user to develop a system to strategically collect and analyze data as it relates to these two, at times overlapping, special populations. Its related secondary rubric guides the user through the protocols, systems, and structures necessary to ensure accurate student identification, the composition of evaluation teams, communication with families, appropriate instruction within the least restrictive environment either with 504 services[6] or an individualized educational plan (IEP), and the use of OCR data.

The following row addresses serving ML-EL students who opt out of EL programs or services, specifically districts' responsibilities to these students and their families. Here, the secondary rubric guides the user in developing resources to communicate with and notify parents and/ or guardians, as well as systems for both the opt-out and opt-back-in processes, and finally, protocols for monitoring the academic and linguistic process of ML-EL students who opt out.

The next rubric row examines exiting ML-ELs from EL programs and services and monitoring their progress after exit. In this case, the secondary rubric guides the user in developing systems to track ML-ELs' English proficiency and content area proficiency, develop district protocols for EL program exit, or reclassification, and protocols to monitor former-ELs' progress after exit/ reclassification.

The penultimate rubric row guides the user to identify existing systems, tools, and resources that will allow the district or EL leader to systematically evaluate the district's EL program. Specifically, the secondary rubric guides the user in how to meet Title III reporting requirements, and internally assess program implementation, determine the adequacy of existing staffing and professional learning, set/maintain appropriate program goals for students, the instructional program, and finally, identify areas for improvement.

We close the rubric with a final row devoted to meaningful communication with ML parents and guardians. Here, the secondary rubric describes potential structures and systems to be implemented around interpretation and translation services and their related professional development, code of ethics, punctuality of services, levels, and quality of support, and finally, access to school communication more broadly.

Developing and Implementing Systems and Policies: Norming and Focus Areas

A district or EL leader working within any educational context can employ the initial (or launching) rubric of the Lau plan guidance tool to identify a starting point for guiding the development and improvement of their Lau plan. Following formative consideration, we encourage district and EL leaders to engage a working group of district experts to delve into the process together, to share and discuss their responses. During this process, a broad group of ML-EL stakeholders would ideally

[6] https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/504faq.html

develop shared goals and common targets for programs, policies, and procedures tailored to the district's specific needs. Following initial engagement with the tool, we recommend that district stakeholders focus as a group on one secondary tool, evaluating their context's strengths and needs in one specific area in greater depth. We find that stabilizing one area in a district often elevates the educational systems and structures related to elements of other secondary rubrics. For example, if stakeholders identify intake protocols as an initial area of consideration and then focus on how to improve them, those results can support the creation of procedures and annual growth targets, as well as provide systems to evaluate progress towards those goals. Ideally, as users progress through the rubrics, they will be able to develop and build structures that will address existing and newly identified ML-EL student needs.

Research & Policy into Practice: Using the Rubric to Enhance ML-EL Educational Equity

We designed the multi-level Lau plan guidance tool to support an iterative cycle of user input and development of systems, structures, and policies. As we have shared the tool and its rubrics, we have been moved by the rich, engaging conversations that have emerged across our state and nationally. Our goal was to create an easily accessible, informative tool to support rural, low-EL incidence rubrics on their pathways to EL educational equity. Along the way, we have found that educational leaders in urban and suburban contexts as well as rural districts have engaged positively with the tool.
Ideally, as district and EL leaders navigate these rubrics, they will generate rich conversations about policy interpretation, policy implementation, and evidence-based practices to improve ML-EL educational equity overall. The field would benefit from future research that examines the potential impact of this tool in depth. For example, in exploring how ML-EL practitioners use this tool, researchers might examine whether and how they develop more equitable, accessible Lau plans. As schools and districts begin to use the Lau plan guidance tool, data analysts on these sites will be able to explore any downstream impact its use might have on ML-EL students' educational experiences and ultimately, academic outcomes. These types of data take time to emerge, collect, and analyze; we invite district leaders and other researcher-practitioner teams to contribute to this inquiry engaging with the tool to develop improve equity in ML-EL students' educational experiences and outcomes.

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Appendix A

Instructions for free district access to the Lau Plan Guidance Tool

AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice readers will have free access for one (1) year after the online publication date.

- *Access the Lau Plan Guidance Tool at the following site:* ***https://www.oakbridgeconsultingllc.com/tools***
- *Click* ***"learn more"****,* ***"sign up"****, and "****create an account"***
- *Enter the coupon code* ***"AASA"***
- *No credit card information is needed.*

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Length of manuscripts should be as follows: Research and evidence-based practice articles between **2,800** and **4,800** words; commentaries between **1,600** and **3,800** words; book and media reviews between **400** and **800** words. Articles, commentaries, book and media reviews, citations and references are to follow the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, **latest edition**. Permission to use previously copyrighted materials is the responsibility of the author, not the *AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice*.

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2. contributor name(s)
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12. 40-word biographical sketch

Please do not submit page numbers in headers or footers. Rather than use footnotes, it is preferred authors embed footnote content in the body of the article. Also note**, APA guidelines have changed so that one space is required after the period at the end of a sentence**. Articles are to be submitted to the editor by e-mail as an electronic attachment in Microsoft Word, Times New Roman, 12 Font.

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