

## Equity in policy and practice: how school and district leaders support multilingual learners

Nora Turriago, Amanda Datnow, John Diaz, Shana Cohen and Alison Wishard Guerra

UCSD Department of Education Studies, University of California San Diego, La Jolla, CA, USA

### ABSTRACT

Educating multilingual learners (MLs) is a pressing policy challenge across the globe. In the US, district and school leaders are tasked with the urgent need to promote equity-informed policies and practices that transform educational outcomes for MLs. Drawing on a qualitative study of leadership practices and policy in a California school district, this paper focuses on how district and school leadership promote equity for ML students. Findings reveal that policy and fiscal components are areas of strength in supporting MLs, as is the critical consciousness of district and site leaders and their deep commitment to serving ML students and their families. Systems and policies are in place to support equitable learning experiences; however, these policies do not universally reach all schools and all ML learners. Issues such as staffing, limited opportunities to receive professional development, and variation in programming at schools with low numbers of MLs, are constraints that have tangible impacts on school leaders' experiences with serving MLs. Implications for policy and practice are discussed.

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Educating multilingual learners<sup>1</sup> (MLs) is a pressing policy challenge across the globe, particularly given increasing migration due to economic reasons, political instability, climate change, and other factors. Many migrants speak languages other than the language of the host country (European Education and Culture Executive Agency 2019). In 2024, MLs represented about 11% of total student enrolment in US public schools, and California serves over 1 million MLs each year (California Department of Education 2024; NCES 2024). MLs in US schools face a myriad of educational challenges, including inadequate school resources, poor home-school communication, and limited capacity of

school personnel to attend to student needs (Garver and Hopkins 2020). MLs commonly do not receive linguistically appropriate services and instruction (Gándara and Contreras 2009; Kangas 2018; NCES 2024). They are frequently misidentified for disabilities (Sanatullova-Allison and Robison-Young 2016), and MLs with disabilities are regularly denied the services they need (Kangas 2019). Given these circumstances, it is not surprising MLs continue to have lower educational outcomes when compared to their monolingual peers (Rodriguez et al. 2022; Schlaman 2019; Zarate and Gándara 2019).

In 2015, the passage of the *Every Student Succeeds Act* in the US shifted responsibility for the oversight and monitoring of English Learner (EL) programmes and outcomes from the federal level to state and local agencies (Callahan et al. 2022). While state leaders now have the opportunity to develop ML indicators reflective of their local educational context (Callahan and Hopkins 2017), states, districts, and schools vary in their levels of support and programming for ML students (Callahan et al. 2022). For instance, states are responsible for developing their own accountability systems and establishing long-term goals for ML achievement, including defining what it means to reach proficiency in English, setting entry and exit criteria, and developing an English Language Proficiency indicator in their state accountability system (Villegas and Pompa 2020). States also decide what type of ML programming is available, which often depends on ML student enrolment and linguistic needs. Though states are required to report the number of MLs, there is no available data that looks at programming at the school level as it is not required to be included in formal accountability measures.

As many states do not specify what programming is available for MLs, these decisions fall instead to the discretion of the local decision making of school districts. This lack of specificity lends itself to variability throughout the district level, as the implementation of ML programmes depends on organisational capacity related to sufficient resources and qualified personnel (Callahan and Hopkins 2017). Some states, for instance, provide bilingual education programmes but the capacity to do so depends on the ML student population and their academic needs related to linguistic diversity, as well as fiscal resources, staffing, and appropriate training.

As there is no requirement for providing specific language instructional programmes, school districts can choose from a variety of language programme models that best fit the needs of the ML population. For instance, there is a range of Dual Language Education models, including one-way immersion (where students in the classroom all come from the same linguistic group) and two-way immersion (where the classroom is made up of the two linguistic groups) (Cervantes-Soon 2014; Morita-Mullaney, Renn, and Chiu 2020). Alternately, in Structured English Immersion programmes, instruction is conducted exclusively in English, with teaching strategies designed to support MLs. In Heritage Language Programmes, instruction is provided in

English and the student's home language to support MLs with gaining literacy in their native language.

Within the policy environment for ML education in California, this paper focuses on how district and school leadership promote equity for ML students. District and school leaders are tasked with the urgent need to promote equity-informed policies and practices that transform educational outcomes for culturally and linguistically diverse students and foster inclusivity (Cruze et al. 2021; Santamaria 2014). It is critical to learn more about how leaders think about and support educational equity for MLs. Drawing on a qualitative study of leadership practices and policy in a California school district serving a significant number of MLs, we address the following questions:

1. How do district infrastructure and policies support or hinder school and district leaders in enacting equity-minded practices for ML students?
2. How do school and district leaders promote educational equity for multilingual learners?

To provide a foundation for this work, we turn to the literature review and conceptual framework.

## **Literature review and conceptual framework**

We begin our literature review with a discussion of the need for a systemic approach to examining how leaders support ML equity, attending to both system infrastructures and policies. Next, we review research on how school leaders promote equity for ML through supporting teacher professional learning, collaborating with stakeholders, and developing critical consciousness. As we will explain, these areas align with Ishimaru and Galloway's (2014) framework of equitable leadership practice which grounds this study.

### ***Systemic approach to supporting ML equity***

This study is anchored in evidence that supporting ML students is a systemic enterprise. Enacting new visions of teaching and learning for multilingual students involves building or rebuilding infrastructures and policies to support those changes. As Hopkins et al. (2014) explains, 'system transformation depends on excellent practice being developed, shared, demonstrated, and adopted across and between schools' (273). Educational systems that coordinate to support transformation have a number of features in common (Datnow et al. 2022; Peurach, Yurkofsky, and Sutherland 2019). First, they manage diverse stakeholders to build support and educational infrastructures that encourage continuous improvement of teaching and learning through professional learning. Second, they foster collaborative cultures and trusting

relationships to support distributed leadership and collaborative problem solving. Third, such systems develop and distribute leadership systemwide based on individuals' strengths (Datnow et al. 2022; Peurach, Yurkofsky, and Sutherland 2019). Fourth, equitable educational systems must be responsive to the socioeconomic, immigration, and geographic context of the student-body. In their implementation of the 'ecology of equity' framework, Kanno and colleagues (2025) argue that equitable practice for MLs likely looks different depending on these contextual factors. For example, responsive high schools provide students with alternate postsecondary pathways (e.g. trade school) and social mobility opportunities that encourage a college-going atmosphere (Jaffe-Walter and Lee 2011; Kanno et al. 2025; Knight-Diop 2010).

Existing research also underscores the importance of leaders examining how the broader systemic context informs their work (Callahan et al. 2021; DeMatthews and Izquierdo 2016; Fetman 2018; Kanno et al. 2025). Callahan et al. (2021) suggest that leaders attempting to implement culturally responsive and sustaining leadership practices should first identify existing challenges that might limit their agency, including state and district policies related to testing, instructional practices, and shared goals around ML education. DeMatthews, Serafini, and Watson (2021) found that federal policies related to immigration can negatively influence ML students' academic outcomes and emotional well-being, due to the stress of potential deportation and shifting immigration policies. Newcomer and Cowin (2018) examined how one principal navigated restrictive state policies that would negatively impact ML students. The principal challenged Arizona's ban on bilingual education by making use of the parent waiver option, thereby maintaining the school's dual language programme. Kanno et al. (2025) found that structural challenges at the school and district level can constrain ML students' success in the academic pipeline. Such leadership practices take on a heightened importance depending on the national and state policy and political climates around immigration and language use. With limited existing literature on systems-wide leadership focused on ML equity, we hope to advance the field by identifying school and district leadership efforts to promote ML educational equity.

### *Supporting quality teaching and supportive climates for MLs*

School and district leaders influence ML educational equity in part by hiring, retaining, and supporting qualified and experienced teachers with relevant ML experience (Chesnut and Morita-Mullaney 2023; DeMatthews and Izquierdo 2016). To address the limited number of qualified teachers with ML expertise, Callahan and Hopkins (2017) suggest that leaders develop 'strategic staffing initiatives' (760). Chesnut and Morita-Mullaney (2023) provide an example of such an initiative in which principals aspired to recruit bilingual teachers from

within their own school communities and assist bilingual candidates with teacher certification programmes.

School and district leaders also support equity for MLs through efforts to support teacher learning and collaboration (Ascenzi-Moreno, Hesson, and Menken 2016; Hopkins, Gluckman, and Vahdani 2019; Lavadenz et al. 2021). For instance, one principal in Ascenzi-Moreno, Hesson, and Menken (2016) study described a collaboration structure supported MLs: 'We programmed collaborative [teacher] teams, so that all the content areas who taught the ELLs ... were able to meet collaboratively at least 2–3 times a week, so that they could meet and talk ...' (211). Collaboration for ML education through formal structures that include staff members from different positions better foster transparency and a shared understanding for ML student learning.

Structured professional development is a main vehicle through which leaders develop and promote an asset-based mindset towards MLs and instructional methods to support MLs (Callahan et al. 2021; Leu Bonanno 2022; Louie et al. 2019). For instance, Leu Bonanno (2022) found that principals implemented school-wide professional development focused on cultural awareness and ML-specific instructional strategies, while at the same time providing opportunities for teachers to discuss issues of race and equity with students in the classroom. This two-fold approach demonstrates how principals utilised professional development as a tool to both involve the entire school community and position ML educational equity as a priority. Leaders foster a shared commitment and responsibility for ML equity by creating a culture of high expectations, cultural responsiveness, and an asset-based mindset (Ascenzi-Moreno, Hesson, and Menken 2016; DeMatthews and Izquierdo 2017; Umansky, Hopkins, and Dabach 2020).

### *Collaborating with stakeholders*

By collaborating with diverse stakeholders – including family and community members, as well local government officials and businesses owners – school and district leaders in numerous studies formed key partnerships and leveraged their own social and political capital to increase educational opportunities and resources for ML students and their families (DeMatthews and Izquierdo 2020; Newcomer and Cowin 2018; Torres Clark and Chrispeels 2022). For example, a superintendent in DeMatthews et al.'s (2017) formed a strategic coalition of local politicians. These efforts successfully influenced statewide policy for social justice (DeMatthews and Izquierdo 2017).

Additionally, leaders prioritise engaging family and community members as co-collaborators for ML equity. They do this by creating community spaces for parents and families within the school, translating school information into the relevant languages, hiring ML parents within the school, providing English language and GED classes for parents, creating ML-related school advisory councils made up of students, teachers, and parents, and having community liaisons facilitate

family workshops on dual language programming and enrolment, literacy practices, and community events (Mogg, Martinez-Alba, and Cruzado-Guerrero 2017; Newcomer and Cowin 2018; Palmer et al. 2019). These efforts helped integrate ML parents into the school culture by providing equity-informed, often alternative, spaces for ML parents to assert their agency and engage with district and school staff.

### *Leaders' critical consciousness and language ideologies*

Numerous studies point to how school leaders draw from their own experiences and beliefs – specifically, their critical consciousness and personal language ideology – to cultivate a personal commitment to supporting MLs (Bernstein et al. 2020; Cervantes-Soon et al. 2017; Cruze and López 2020). Palmer et al. (2019) define critical consciousness as being able to ‘develop political and ideological clarity about the purpose of schooling, interrogate the status quo, disrupt deficit thinking about minoritized groups, and consider alternative explanations for student underachievement,’ which then allows leaders to better understand and analyse educational policies, outcomes, and practices for equity (123). Callahan et al. (2021) calls such self-work ‘essential’ for identifying and dismantling oppressive educational structures.

Relatedly, De La Cruz Albizu (2020) examined how school leaders’ ideologies about language and language education influence their policy decisions within the school. Guided by their belief systems, principals determine what language acquisition programmes are offered – such as dual language instruction – and which students have access to such programming (De La Cruz Albizu 2020). Overall, leaders’ efforts in relation to multilingual education are influenced by the extent to which they have personally developed critical consciousness about the inequities faced by ML students and their values and beliefs related to language.

### *Framework for equitable leadership practice*

Many of the tenets above regarding how leaders support equity for MLs are present in Ishimaru and Galloway’s (2014) more general framework of equitable leadership practice. Grounded in the research and aligned to the six national Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium standards, the framework consists of 10 leadership practices and the drivers that differentiate a continuum of equity for each practice:

1. Constructing and enacting an equity vision
2. Supervising for equitable teaching and learning
3. Developing organisational leadership for equity
4. Fostering an equitable school culture
5. Allocating resources

6. Hiring and placing personnel
7. Collaborating with families and communities
8. Engaging in self-reflection and growth for equity
9. Modelling
10. Influencing the sociopolitical context

Drawing from the educational improvement and reform literature, Ishimaru and Galloway (2014) also propose three drivers to determine the level of equitable leadership practice. Leadership levers are the framing of disparities and action; the construction and enactment of leadership, the creation and integration of a culture of inquiry. They explain that ‘the practices themselves highlight *what* behaviors and actions fall in a particular domain of leadership, but the three drivers differentiate *how* these practices are enacted in a way that the literature suggests may lead to greater equity of results ...’ (Ishimaru and Galloway 2014, 101).

Key to this framework is that leadership practice is the central unit of change, rather than a single individual in a formal role such as a school principal. That is, leadership practices to promote equity involve the actions of many across a system. As such, this framework focuses on how to develop organisational leadership to eliminate educational disparities. While this framework is primarily focused on school leaders, we extend its application to examining district leadership as well as many of these practices also apply. As we will explain in the methods section, we used this framework, along with the extant literature cited above, to guide our analysis of the data.

## Methods

This study draws from qualitative data gathered as part of a project that is nested in a broader research-practice partnership (RPP) between university researchers and educators in a California public school district serving a large number of ML students (see Datnow et al. 2023). The RPP was formed over eight years ago, originally to address teachers pressing questions about child development in the early grades. Since then, the partnership has evolved to focus on supporting the improvement of education for MLs in early elementary education, as this was deemed to be a pressing issue by district leaders. The data collection for this portion of the project involved qualitative data collection and analysis of data from interview transcripts and district policy documents related to ML education. While we refer to students as MLs, the district documents refer to the students as ELs in keeping with federal and state policy.

## Research site

California has the largest ML student population in the nation. Out of California’s 5.9 million total students, currently 19% are identified as English Learners

(California Department of Education 2024). The district in this study is comprised of approximately 20,000 students, 15% of whom are designated English Learners, mostly Hispanic and from low-income families. Such student demographics represent the growing diversity of many districts across the nation. The district offers three instructional programmes for MLs. At the elementary level (K-5), the district offers a Structured English Immersion (SEI) programme and a Dual-Language Immersion (DLI) programme. At the middle school and high school levels, MLs have access to SEI and a Heritage Language Instruction (HLI) Program. The SEI programme provides all classroom instruction in English, with specific strategies to support MLs. For this, the district utilises Guided Language Acquisition Design (GLAD) as an instructional model that supports the implementation of daily integrated English-language development (ELD) and designated ELD. The DLI programme is also available in several elementary schools for all students – not just MLs – to promote English and Spanish bilingualism and biliteracy.

### *Data collection*

#### *Interviews with school and district leaders*

For the purpose of this study, we conducted thirteen semi-structured interviews with school and district administrators in Spring 2023. As our focus in the RPP is on elementary education, all district administrators who had involvement with ML education at the elementary level were invited to participate. A total of six of seven district administrators whom we invited consented to participation in interviews. A total of seven of the ten elementary school principals who had participated in the RPP consented to participation in interviews. These principals led schools with concentrations of MLs ranging from 4% to 58% across the seven schools. All seven elementary schools offered an SLI programme, and two of the seven also offered a DLI programme that parents could opt into. All participants had over 20 years of experience as educators and administrators. Interviews lasted for 45-60 min and were recorded on Zoom. Informed by existing literature and Ishimaru and Galloway's (2014) framework, we developed an interview protocol to ask leaders about their professional background, system and school infrastructure to support MLs, school culture, and ML parents and families.

#### *Document review*

In addition to conducting interviews, we also conducted a review of district policy documents related to ML education to better understand how equity was codified in the regulatory structures that govern district and school site practices. To accomplish this, the district website was scanned for all publicly available documents, wherein each link or webpage was reviewed in its entirety across the entire site, and relevant pages, articles, policy documents and presentations that focused on or referenced MLs were exported. This search yielded 20

documents, which were subsequently reviewed to understand key patterns in relation to district structure, including budget and finance, programme and curriculum design, community engagement and parent involvement. While we gathered these documents in 2024, all of the documents were created during 2022–2023 (the same year interviews took place), with the exception of two strategic/long range planning documents that included that year but spanned beyond it. Our goal in analysing these documents was to gain insight into the policies, resource commitments, and infrastructures that were established to support MLs. This information was helpful in learning about the kinds of supports district leaders created as well as those that site leaders could draw upon in supporting MLs.

### *Data analysis*

Interviews were transcribed verbatim and uploaded into Dedoose (Version 9.2.22b) for analysis. Drawing from the interview protocol and guided by the literature on ML leadership and Ishimaru and Galloway's (2014) framework, our research team collaboratively developed a codebook to identify and examine leadership practices and policies supporting the improvement of education for MLs. In our analysis, we explore how leaders across the system support MLs. Some codes mapped directly onto the Ishimaru and Galloway (2014) framework and thus informed our parent codes. For instance, three of Ishimaru and Galloway's (2014) identified leadership practices for equity – constructing and enacting an equity vision, developing organisational leadership for equity, and engaging in self-reflection and growth for equity, and modelling behaviour that aligns with a commitment to equity (or practices 1, 3, 8, and 9) – were all grouped together as *leadership*, representing a parent code that fit within our existing coding schema. The related child codes for leadership include emotions, identity, critical consciousness, path, and reflection. Ishimaru and Galloway's (2014) equitable leadership practice of collaborating with families and communities is reflected in our *family relations* parent code (child codes include district and school efforts, family agency, and family communication), in addition to fostering equitable school culture which we name *district/school culture towards MLs* in our codebook. Our parent code *system infrastructure* takes into account supervising teaching, allocation of resources, and hiring personnel (or practices 2, 4, 6). The only leadership practice we did not include was influencing sociopolitical context, as leaders did not discuss their political advocacy at the local, national, and federal level.

Not all of our codes mapped directly onto the Ishimaru and Galloway (2014) framework. As our aim was to understand leadership specifically for ML equity, we added ML specific parent codes (*ML specific* and *district/school culture towards MLs*). We also incorporated a parent code that took into account teacher perspectives and the SPED referral process, as this reflected the wider

scope of our data. All our codes successfully fit within Ishimaru and Galloway's (2014) three drivers to gauge the level of equitable leadership practice. The three drivers of framing disparities and action, the construction and enactment of leadership, and the creation and integration of a culture of inquiry help indicate equitable leadership practices and outcomes for students, ranging from little to no equity, emerging, proficient, and exemplary. We expand more on this in our findings section. While Ishimaru and Galloway (2014) focus specifically on the leadership of school principals, we expanded their framework to take into account district-wide leadership. As such, we required additional codes to make sense of the full scope of our data. A list of codes and definitions is in Appendix A.

Throughout the coding process, our research team met regularly to discuss emerging themes, refine coding definitions, and ask questions for further clarity throughout the data analysis process. To establish consistency in coding, members of the research team coded the same transcript and compared coded segments. Subsequently, four team members (who are authors of this paper) coded the transcripts. Examples of coded data are included in Appendix B. Once data were coded, we looked for patterns across coded segments in order to ascertain themes. As we will explain, some of the themes that emerged from this analysis aligned with previous studies and with Ishimaru and Galloway's (2014) framework. However, we also found novel themes arising from this study.

As noted above, the analysis of documents involved a process by which we first identified district documents with any reference to the education of MLs. There were 20 documents that fell into this category. We then read each document to get a better sense of the content and topics covered. In the course of this process, we noted that eight documents were not particularly relevant for the purposes of the present study, primarily because they only tangentially discussed MLs as part of a larger district initiative. Among those documents that centred ML experiences, there was considerable redundancy across the remaining 12 documents, with three comprehensive documents being most central in including information across others: the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP)<sup>2</sup>; the District EL Master Plan, and the district's strategic plan. These documents, which are described in detail in Appendix C, were coded in Dedoose using the same codebook described above, though some codes were not relevant to the document analysis.

### *Positionality*

As authors of this paper, we come to this work from a variety of backgrounds and professional paths. Three of us are university professors, and two of us are graduate students. Prior to entering academia, most of us have worked as teachers or teaching assistants in preschool or elementary classrooms, and

one of us worked in the resource division of a district office. All five members of our team are multilingual, and most have professional experience working with multilingual students. Though we bring our unique lenses to this work, it is important to note that we all conceptualise ML students through an equity-minded, asset-based lens (Khalifa et al. 2016; Ladson-Billings 1998; Paris 2012). An asset-based approach towards MLs values, prioritises, and supports their cultural and linguistic background and knowledge.

## Findings

An analysis of data yielded four main findings about leadership efforts in promoting educational equity for MLs. First, we lay out the existing district policy context by drawing on our document analysis to describe the programming, policy landscape, and resource commitments that support equity for MLs in the district. By providing the larger policy context as evidenced in district documents, we are then able to explain in subsequent findings how leaders operationalise such policies for ML equity, noting any gaps that may arise. Next, we shift our focus to the school and district leader levels, explaining how efforts for equity are rooted in leaders' values and experiences and influenced by the context in which the leader is situated. To further interrogate such efforts, we discuss how these leadership practices align within Ishimaru and Galloway's (2014) framework, including where leadership efforts towards ML equity fall within the emerging, proficient, or exemplary ranking of the three drivers of equitable leadership. Third, we examine leadership efforts to incorporate and make visible the cultural and linguistic diversity of MLs within the school culture and instructional materials. Finally, we discuss how leaders supported ML family and community participation and engagement, while also recognising the need for increased efforts to further position ML families as partners.

### *Finding 1: the policy and fiscal structure of the district express an orientation towards equity*

In articulating its mission and values, the district defined equity in terms of valuing diversity and providing equitable access to all students. In reviewing district policy documents, there was clear alignment in how this conception of equity was both theorised and made practical across the district budget, and programme design/implementation. Across the three key documents (Strategic planning framework, LCAP, and EL Master Plan), 48 segments of text were coded as either speaking about equity explicitly, or outlining practices that have been shown by research to advance equitable conditions for ML students.

First, the stated mission, vision and goals of the district explicitly express a focus on cultivating equitable learning experiences for MLs that honour and

build upon the cultural and linguistic traditions of MLs and their communities. The district's strategic planning framework outlines equity as one of its core values and positions cultural responsiveness as leading measures of meeting district goals.

The district's Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) connected their vision and goals to the budget. Specifically, Goal 1 from the strategic planning framework described the aim 'to create equitable access to the conditions of learning' that enable students to thrive. This goal was developed in tandem with parents and community members, whose feedback directed the district to prioritise students with disabilities, students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, and MLs as key beneficiaries. In addition, Goal 1 focused on the implementation of the district's Special Education Strategic Plan, which centred what are called 'unduplicated' pupils (English Learner, eligible for a free or reduced-price meal, or foster youth) and required classroom inclusion for students with disabilities across all unduplicated groups.

The investments made through the LCAP provided the resources needed to implement the policy structure and design laid out in The EL Master Plan, which provided clear and comprehensive procedures to ensure inclusion, differentiation, and a continuum of learning options and modalities for MLs in the classroom. In the LCAP and the EL Master Plan, several best practices were evident in the design of the district's instructional programmes, as well as identification, placement and assessment processes:

- (1) Language Acquisition Programs: As noted above, the district offers three programmes for MLs: Structured English Immersion (SEI) which is currently offered in all district schools K – 12, a rapidly growing Dual-Language Immersion (also Dual Language Immersion or DLI) programme, which is currently offered in several elementary schools and two middle schools and has seen participation rates increase significantly over the years, and a Heritage Language Program (also Heritage Language Instruction or HLI) offered at several district middle and high schools.<sup>3</sup> As a result of making these programmes available, 4% of Long-Term English Learners (LTELs) reclassified as English-Proficient, doubling the district's goal, and 18% of students achieved the California State Seal of Biliteracy in the 2024 school year.
- (2) Equitable learning environments for MLs with Individualised Educational Programs (IEPs). In the IEP assessment process, the district required that all assessments be done in linguistically appropriate ways, including conducting the assessment in a student's home language, aligning goals with language development progress, and designating special education staff to ensure students are receiving ELD and Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English in conjunction and collaboration with the general education teacher. The district rate of inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms is close to 60%, and the district funded a

new inclusion resource teacher to provide training and support for staff on inclusive practices for multilingual students.

- (3) Assessments: In the district, ML progress was monitored using both summative and formative assessments to determine student English language proficiency as well as growth towards reclassification.<sup>4</sup>
- (4) Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS): The district utilised MTSS to serve all students, with particular attention to MLs and other unduplicated pupils. The MTSS provides preventative services and resources to both serve target student needs as well as introduce more culturally responsive elements. This is done through providing professional development for teachers to utilise specific instructional practices, as well as supplemental learning opportunities such as tutoring, after school programming or small group instruction, social and emotional learning supports through school-based MTSS teams, and a family and community engagement network to support families.<sup>5</sup> The district reported that preliminary results from a state survey have shown modest success in the areas of social-emotional support for students, which directly connects to district MTSS efforts.

Overall, by offering a continuum of options for MLs to participate in the programme that best suits their language development needs, codifying inclusive practices in district regulatory language, as well as providing supplemental supports and dynamic assessments, the district policy documents provide a critical foundation for ensuring that MLs receive the services they are legally entitled to through federal laws such as the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act and the Every Student Succeeds Act.

The district's articulated mission for ML equity partly aligns with Ishimaru and Galloway's (2014) framework on equitable leadership practice, as the district has *constructed* an organisational purpose and clear vision for ML equity as evidenced in its formal district policies related to strategic planning, fiscal priorities, and available language instructional programmes for MLs. This also aligns with the first driver indicating equitable leadership: framing disparities and action. The district has a clearly stated equity frame and discourse that reflects a commitment to take action at the school level, which Ishimaru and Galloway (2014) would likely be deemed proficient (an exemplary ranking would have to reflect a collective, community engagement around an equity vision, well as demonstrated long-term outcomes for students as a result of policy changes) based on our findings. Additionally, the use of student data and family and community feedback to inform available language acquisition programming, district strategic support, and the identification, placement, and assessment process falls under what Ishimaru and Galloway (2014) define as *proficient* equitable leadership practice under the third driver of inquiry culture, as leaders use data to inform and change district and school instructional practices and policies as

evidenced in the district documents and subsequent ML student representation and outcomes.

By analysing district documents, we are able to describe and identify the larger policy context of the district. While such policies provide a valuable opportunity to advance equity for MLs, whether or not they are *enacted*, and the degree to which leaders operationalise such policies in practice, depends on leaders' personal commitments and the context for school-level implementation, topics we turn to next.

***Finding 2: leadership's commitment to equity is influenced by their experiences and at times constrained by organisational conditions***

Many school and district leaders discussed how their personal upbringing and professional experiences led to an understanding of and commitment to supporting MLs and their families. For instance, one principal working in a socio-culturally diverse community with a school population of approximately one third of students classified as English Learners shared how her own experience as multilingual learner shaped her current leadership approach:

As an English Learner, I feel I bring in a different lens to the table ... I do have that experience and I'm able to speak to things that maybe someone else who is monolingual might not have. So I feel that I am able to relate and I'm able to speak on experiences or possible experiences or scenarios that our students go through, our families go through ... With the families, I'm able to literally communicate with them and explain things in a level that they're able to understand.

Based on her identity, experience, and bilingual skill set, this principal was able to understand the concerns and needs facing MLs and their families, and successfully engage and communicate supports available to them. One district administrator referenced his experience with a Mexican heritage music club, noting it provided the 'challenge of learning a different language and culture' while then referencing his past role of a bilingual educator, which helped him become 'empathetic to the experiences [teachers] have and the challenges that they've faced.' By discussing their professional and personal experiences, leaders were able to articulate and demonstrate their commitment for ML equity, including their approach towards ML students and the teachers that serve them.

Leaders also discussed how organisational conditions related to resource allocation, hiring practices, and district-level support were well intentioned, yet they still felt constrained their efforts to engage in equitable practices for ML students. For instance, while the district provided professional development training for most teachers who work with MLs, there was less ML-related training for principals. One principal whose school population is approximately 50% MLs reflected, 'we haven't really gotten too much training as principals on how

to support our English Learners ... It's little bits of time in our elementary principal meetings, if we're lucky.' Another principal from a school serving less than 5% MLs spoke of a discrepancy related to which schools were provided ML-related professional development:

Specific training? I have not received any. Some schools get GLAD [Guided Language Acquisition Instruction] ... I am not one of them. Unfortunately, if you're a school like mine [with a lower number of MLs], I don't get a lot of the same things as other people.

This principal explained that schools with smaller numbers of MLs tended not to have as many ML-related resources as those with larger populations. It is not surprising, however, that the district allocated resources to schools with the greatest need.

School leaders also identified the limited availability of trained and licensed bilingual teachers as a barrier for implementing efforts for ML equity. One principal from a school that offers both a DLI language programme called this the greatest challenge, saying, 'there's such a competition for them ... Last year, I had a [bilingual educator] position and there was a pool and ... there were only six candidates, and five of them had already gotten jobs by the time I called them.' Without trained and experienced bilingual educators, efforts for ML equity can fall short.

Efforts for equity were further restrained by district expectations, particularly regarding new policies related to collaboration which were part of the teachers' contract. One district administrator reflected on how collaboration time was insufficient to help teachers to fully understand and implement district initiatives. Teachers were offered additional money to collaborate before or after school hours, making collaboration now an 'opt in.' The administrator went on to share that

now, if one teacher decides not to come, they have the right to do that. And so there may not be those departmental or school wide initiatives that are able to be rolled out and really fleshed out and reflected on and edited and improved ... like we've done in the past. So it's going to be challenging.

In essence, limits on collaboration time were a barrier to supporting initiatives that promoted equity for MLs.

Some school leaders also noted that they wished for more concrete support on translating the district's vision for ML equity into practice across the entire district. To this end, one principal working in a school with the majority of students classified as English Learners called for 'really strong systems and structures' that will detail 'here's what we do to support our ELs and here's what it looks like at every single school.' The discrepancy of district support and services across schools limited the capacity for some leaders to *enact* the district's vision of ML equity, denoting how the district could perhaps have done more to support the articulated organisational vision for ML equity, as per Ishimaru and Galloway's (2014) framework. In sum, there was a sense from some

principals that in order to achieve equity, more support was required to fully meet the varied needs of MLs at different schools while also achieving coherence across the district. These ideas align with findings from other scholars showing that structural barriers can impede successful outcomes for MLs, pointing to the need for education systems to customise supports based on students' needs and the surrounding context (Kanno et al. 2025).

***Finding 3: leaders promote equity by incorporating ML cultural and linguistic identities into school and district cultures, though efforts vary by site***

Both school and district leaders identified successful efforts to create an asset-based culture towards ML students and families, including providing classroom activities and school events that reflect and celebrate ML students and their cultural backgrounds. However, leaders acknowledged that more needs to be done, and efforts to incorporate ML students' cultural and linguistic identities varied across school sites.

Many leaders pointed to the increasing presence of bilingual leaders as well as cultural performances and events as evidence of how MLs were valued within the school and district culture. For instance, one district administrator referenced the Spanish-speaking superintendent and number of school leaders and teachers who reflect the ML population as proof of how the district has 'gotten significantly better in the last couple of years' in creating an asset-based culture towards MLs. The administrator went on to mention how current cultural celebrations and events backed by the district, including *baile folklórico* and mariachi band performances, reflected a recent shift towards creating a district culture that celebrates ML students and communities, noting that 'I feel like [the district] is shifting to be not just welcoming, but celebratory. And an expectation that we have that inclusivity that I don't think was there nine years ago.' This shift in district culture and approach towards MLs is therefore evidenced by the cultural events throughout the district and school level.

At the same time, leaders noted it was a continual challenge to ensure that efforts to bring in the cultural and linguistic diversity of MLs are authentic and holistic. Many leaders reflected on how to incorporate more linguistic and cultural diversity within the classroom and throughout school campuses. For instance, one principal from a school with a majority of MLs served through SEI had raised the following questions with teachers: 'How can we represent who our students are in a bulletin? And how can we make sure that books reflect our students and who they are so that the books don't always look disconnected from them?' The principal added: 'So we've started having those conversations on how can we be more aware of what we celebrate and what we put up on our walls.' Leaders acknowledged that ensuring that MLs are represented

throughout the school and instructional material remains an area of growth. For example, one principal acknowledged that they needed to do more, noting that, 'if you walked across our campus, you wouldn't know we're a [dual language immersion] school which I think that I need to work on.' This principal went on to identify changes that would need to be made, saying 'there should be more signage around the campus that has more Spanish and more English ... I need to do a better job with that.' Some school leaders also mentioned efforts to incorporate and reflect the cultural background of MLs and their families through classroom activities and the curriculum. One principal said the school had displays of students' work and noted that a teacher involved ML parents in science classroom activity.

A tension that arose for principals was how to encourage teachers to create an asset-based curriculum building on ML students' strengths while at the same time ensuring teachers adhere to the district's expectations of using specific textbooks, pacing guides, and curriculum materials. One principal of a school serving few MLs, spoke about this challenge:

Sometimes it feels like people are talking out of both sides of their mouth because in some ways it's like, be innovative, build on kids' strengths. And then the other one is, I expect every time I'm walking through your classroom that you should be on this page at this time. And so the message is really hard. And I think it's hard on principals and its hard on teachers because it feels inauthentic. ... And so there has to be this balance, I think.

While aimed at providing coherence within and across schools, the focus on curriculum fidelity was a challenge for leadership efforts for ML equity, as principals were tasked with balancing district expectations with teacher and student needs. Positioned as enactors of the district vision, principals' experiences naturally differed from those of district administrators who were in the role of developing the expectations.

In sum, school and district leaders attempted to value and celebrate ML cultural and linguistic identities through cultural performances, classroom activities, and making visible student work and performance throughout school campuses. According to Ishimaru and Galloway (2014), this demonstrates efforts towards fostering an equitable school culture, particularly in how leaders develop 'collaboration, trust, and learning, as well as a climate for high expectations for both the adults and the students in the school' (114). The emphasis on valuing the cultural and linguistic background of the ML community would fall under the first driver for identifying equitable leadership: framing disparities and action. As identified by Ishimaru and Galloway (2014), such district events uphold a commitment to celebrating student diversity with an asset-based approach. This, in combination with the aforementioned equity vision and discourse of the district, fulfils a *proficient* ranking in the first equitable leadership driver of framing disparities and action (to achieve

exemplary ranking, leadership practices would have to reflect collective, community action tied to student academic outcomes and success). Additionally, this finding further expands on Ishimaru and Galloway's (2014) leadership practice of fostering an equitable school culture, as we note the tension that can arise within such a process, especially in how leaders identified challenges that hindered efforts for equity, including district expectations regarding curriculum implementation.

***Finding 4: while leaders do provide some support for ML and community engagement, increased efforts are needed to position ML families as partners***

Both school and district leaders identified specific strategies to support ML family and community involvement. In this way, district and school leaders' perspectives were very similar. These strategies included outreach and communication efforts by the district-mandated school community liaisons, parent community forums, and the translation of school documents, following procedures established in the EL Master Plan, strategic plan, and the LCAP. However, leaders also recognised ML family engagement as an area of growth, as many discussed the challenge of including ML family members within the school culture as well as the need to position families as partners to collaborate and inform leaders on ML-related decisions.

Leaders frequently relied on other school personnel – such as the school counsellor, the community liaison, or a bilingual staff member – to conduct family outreach and communication efforts. Reflecting a district-led effort to ensure ML families are included within the school, community liaisons are bilingual community members who have been hired specifically to provide ML family outreach. As such, they were overwhelmingly identified by leaders as integral for providing face-to-face support and communication with ML families. Such outreach led to increased trust between schools and ML families. One district leader reflected on the district-led initiative to create the community liaison positions:

When we did the needs analysis, it was defined by the parents of the English Learners that the parents did not feel comfortable coming to school ... So we created family engagement liaisons for the purpose of being that bridge to parents ... So one of the requirements of it was that all liaisons were required to speak Spanish.

The district leader went on to note the positive change that occurred over time, as it 'took us a couple of years to gain the trust of the Hispanic parents, it didn't happen overnight, even though the liaisons were Hispanic themselves and they were native Spanish speakers themselves ... It took time for them to start to trust us.' Other leaders also echoed how community liaisons served as a cultural bridge to ML parents, providing positive examples of how community liaisons

shared educational resources and information by offering parent workshops in the home language, or would focus on strengthening personal relationships with ML family members to ensure they felt comfortable participating in school events.

With the community liaisons and the translation of school documents regarded as successes, leaders were aware of the need to do more to support ML families. They also identified potential barriers facing ML families that might minimise their ability to participate and communicate with school staff. For instance, one district administrator mentioned ML families might not feel comfortable participating due to political reasons and limited technology:

The Spanish speaking families who may be for political reasons, may be afraid to speak up. They don't know how to speak up, if you will. . . . I was just watching the board meeting last night and actually a parent of a language learner spoke about how she felt she wasn't able to give her opinion about some school closures and things like that. So I think it's a really hard gap to bridge in a way, because you have this political fear maybe ... [and] how do we get a hold of some families who don't have technology? You know, things like that, and how do we help them come to meetings so that their voice is heard?

Although parent forums and organisations that are specific to ML families varied with respect to attendance, they did offer a space for engaging with ML families and including them in leadership decisions. For instance, the state-required English Language Advisory Committee (ELAC) can inform leadership decisions related to MLs. One principal discussed how the forum informed after-school programming, noting that, 'when we engage with our ELAC, the parents always, that's the number one thing they want to see is more tutoring and more after-school opportunities for their students that are learning English.' The principal went on to say that because of this parent input, 'we have actually been able to do a lot of that this year, which has been nice.'

Relatedly, at the district level, the state-required District English Learner Advisory Committee (DELAC) provides a similar opportunity for ML families to attend and discuss their needs and experiences. One district leader shared that the ML family members had so many questions that the district created additional informational DELAC nights. The district administrator reflected on the importance of formal organisations like DELAC:

These are forums that are going to be impacting the life of English Learners ... All these things that parents want to know, but they want to know it from the lens of English Language Learners, so that's one of the venues that has helped us deliver additional messages with our multilingual learners in mind.

What was initially a state requirement became an authentic experience reflecting ongoing parent and district collaboration and conversation, demonstrating the potential such formal groups have to promote equity for MLs and involve ML families and community members as partners and leaders within the school.

In sum, district and school leaders provided resources that promoted ML family outreach and participation, such as interpretation services and the presence of bilingual staff and community liaisons, though they felt that more needed to be done to include ML families as partners within the school. The ELAC and DELAC committees provided venues to gain ML families' perspectives, but in some broader venues such as school board meetings, there was a sense that ML families felt less comfortable speaking out. Although leaders shared their observations on how ML families engagement and participation in the district reflect 'historic and systematic power dynamics and inequities,' (Ishimaru and Galloway 2014, 27) and made efforts to include ML perspective and expertise, this is an area the district could address further in developing equitable leadership. In connecting this finding to Ishimaru and Galloway's (2014) second equity driver of construction and enactment of leadership, there is indeed an effort by the district to involve family and community members in actions and decisions, yet they acknowledge they are working towards increased involvement thereby making this effort towards equity proficient rather than exemplary. While ML families were encouraged to participate in formal organisations and committees, leadership efforts for equity could expand further by ensuring ML family and community are true collaborators with the district.

## Conclusion and implications

The findings from this study reveal the importance of district policies and resource commitments in supporting the goal of equity for ML students. The district in this study has a supportive infrastructure for ML students given its goals, vision, and aligned budget commitments to support ML equity. State policy which allows for districts to have local control over how they allocate resources facilitated the district's ability to design initiatives to meet their students' needs. The district offered multiple types of programming to support MLs, provided resources for staff to support family-school engagement, and some professional development on supporting MLs. Such equity-informed leadership practices align with Ishimaru and Galloway's (2014) leadership framework as well as scholarship examining social justice for MLs (e.g. DeMatthews and Izquierdo 2016; Leu Bonanno 2022). These findings demonstrate the importance of a systems-wide, asset-based approach towards MLs, prioritising community engagement and school-district collaboration to foster a shared responsibility of MLs.

In mapping these leadership findings onto the three drivers of the Ishimaru and Galloway's (2014) framework (framing disparities and action, construction and enactment of leadership, and inquiry culture), the district would likely be deemed *proficient* based on the data we analysed, as there is a robust equity frame and discourse with efforts by leadership to change policies and practices, leadership includes multiple actors and teachers and, to a lesser

extent, considers students, parents, and community members in actions and decisions, while data is used to inform and even change instructional practices to some degree (p.102). To fully embody what Ishimaru and Galloway (2014) define as *exemplary* equitable leadership, the district would have to build on the existing structures for ML family and community engagement to foster a collective plan of action throughout the district and local community as well as demonstrate long-term ML student academic outcomes resulting from district policy changes.

In addition, the leadership practices described in this study extend existing research by ensuring ML students and families are supported on a system-wide level throughout the district, thus providing potential solutions (e.g. more meaningful family engagement in classroom practices) for how to address the systemic educational disparities experienced by ML students. These findings expand on Ishimaru and Galloway's (2014) equity-informed leadership practices by focusing specifically on educational equity for MLs and providing nuance with respect to leadership practices at both the district and school levels.

Although it is clear that policy and fiscal components are an area of strength in the district, the alignment between policy and practice is still challenging at the school level. Findings from interviews with school and district leaders suggest that while the district has systems and policies in place to support equitable learning experiences for MLs, these policies do not universally reach schools and ML learners. Issues such as staffing, limited opportunities to receive professional development, and variation in programming at schools with low numbers of MLs, are constraints that have tangible impacts on school leaders' experiences with serving MLs. These ideas align with findings from other scholars showing that structural barriers can impede successful outcomes for MLs, pointing to the need for education systems to customise supports based on students' needs and the surrounding context (Kanno et al. 2025).

One potential solution is to empower principals to identify potential equity gaps like understaffing of qualified bilingual educators and for district leaders to prioritise efforts to address these gaps. Consistent, and coherent evidence-informed principal professional development about how to best meet the needs of MLs is essential in realising district goals for ML equity. Building positive school-ML family relationships is another area that will require consistent efforts on the part of leaders, even though promising gains have been made. Next, it is important to carefully balance coherence and autonomy within a district, as some efforts to create coherence were perceived at the school level as thwarting educators' ability to address ML students' unique needs. Finally, it is important to realise that leaders are presently in a precarious position, tasked to not only understand specific ML policy – including loopholes that may serve the best interests of MLs – but to advocate for ML students and families and

safeguard their access to educational services and opportunities in a shifting political climate.

This study yields several implications for further research. First, as this study focused on the elementary school level, it is important to examine systemic efforts to support ML equity at the middle and high school levels. Second, while this study provided an in-depth examination of policies and leadership practices, future research should examine how teachers experience leaders' policies and practices towards promoting equity for ML students. For example, understanding how teachers engage with district assessment policies relating to MLs is important, particularly given the consequences for student labelling and referral for special education. Third, as this study revealed that leaders faced different resource and infrastructural allocations depending on whether schools served larger or smaller ML populations, how these decisions were made across schools in the district should be further examined. Finally, it is important to compare leadership practice and policy to other systems serving ML students across the globe. As leaders have varying levels of autonomy and support in different national and local systems, a cross-case comparison could identify thoughtful ways to equitably distribute resources, align policy with practices, and include stakeholders in conversations to promote ML equity.

## Notes

1. While US educational systems use the federally-defined term English Learner to refer to multilingual students who have tested below the state-mandated English language proficiency, we intentionally use the term Multilingual Learners (MLs) as this reflects an asset-orientation of their cultural and linguistic background. English Learners are defined as students who speak a primary language other than English at home and who, based on results of a state-approved language assessment, demonstrate the need for support in learning English language skills in listening comprehension, speaking, reading, and writing (California Department of Education 2024).
2. The Local Control Accountability plan is required for all California public school districts. In this 3-year plan, districts must describe how their goals, programs, and budget are aligned in order to improve student outcomes. It is intended to allow for local-level decision making and community engagement in setting priorities. As of the writing of this article, the district was in its 3rd year of the plan (2021 - 2024) and has since begun a new 3-year cycle. For more information see <https://www.cde.ca.gov/re/lc/>
3. HLI and DLI programs in particular have been shown to increase reclassification rates for students in elementary and middle school (Steele et al. 2017; Watzinger-Tharp, Swenson, and Mayne 2016), as well as decrease language attrition, in addition to increasing socialization opportunities in one's home language, which can foster higher confidence in one's home language (Senar et al. 2023; Bylund and Diaz 2012; Schiefer et al. 2024).

4. Using formative assessments to understand and respond to student needs has been shown to positively impact student achievement and learning, as well as foster greater student agency (Andersson and Palm 2017; Palm et al. 2017).
5. MTSS has been shown to improve student achievement (McCart and Choi 2020) as well as produce other benefits such as reducing school dropout rates (Bohanon et al. 2023). However, only 73% of districts nationwide use MTSS (Panorama Education 2023).

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## Notes on contributors

**Nora Turriago** is a PhD candidate in the Department of Education Studies at the University of California, San Diego. Her research examines leaders' sense making, policy implementation, and program design for multilingual learner equity in K-12 public schools.

**Amanda Datnow** is a Professor and Chancellor's Associates Endowed Chair in the Department of Education Studies and Associate Dean of the School of Social Sciences at the University of California, San Diego. Her research focuses on educational reform and policy, particularly with regard to issues of equity and the professional lives of educators.

**John Diaz** is a PhD student in the Department of Education Studies at the University of California, San Diego. His research focuses on issues of equity within education policy, school finance, and culturally responsive systems development.

**Shana Cohen** is an Associate Professor in the Department of Education Studies at the University of California, San Diego. Her research examines Mexican heritage families' beliefs and experiences with autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

**Alison Wishard Guerra** is an Associate Professor in the Department of Education Studies at the University of California, San Diego. Her research focuses on culture and development in early childhood, with particular focus on social and language development among Latino children.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A. Codebook

Code	Definition
<i>Leadership</i>	
Approach	Refers to specific leadership style, generally. Includes beliefs/values and pedagogical and/or leadership strategies about learning generally and specifically about learning a new language.
Critical consciousness	Intentional, reflective work to understand systemic educational disparities as well as personal bias, particularly in the context of ML equity work. Interviewee describes how their personal background/positionality leads them to adapt and develop leadership practices that contribute to breaking down systemic inequities.
Emotions	Leader emotions include joy, stress, exhaustion, etc.
Identity	Refers to personal and professional history (gender, race, religion, cultural/ language background, family background, SES).
Moves	Specific actions by a leader to support changes within the school/district.
Path	Refers to the personal and professional experiences that led to current position.
Reflection	Interviewee demonstrates reflection on how their personal history/ background shaped their approach to how they lead, but not at the level of critical consciousness. May speak in general terms or be evasive of identities in responses.
<i>System Infrastructure</i>	
Accountability	Efforts to hold schools/teachers accountable for implementing district initiatives.
Coherence	Coherence or lack thereof among district or school expectations and initiatives.
Curriculum use	Refers to how curriculum is used or adopted to account for the educational improvements of students.
District collaboration	Refers to how district staff work together to support students.
District reforms	Recent initiatives in the district that are shaping work in schools.
Dual language programmes	Refers to two-way bilingual programmes in the district and efforts to expand this
ELD resource teacher	Refers to the ELD resource teacher at the school/district and how they support MLs.
Education transformation	Perspectives on how to transform education and improve student learning outcomes.
Fiscal resources	COVID relief funds and other resources that have contributed to infrastructure building.
Institutional barriers	Perspectives on barriers to better supporting students in the school or district.
Professional development	Relevant professional development received by district and site leaders (and teachers) to support students. ML specific code includes GLAD training.
School collaboration	Refers to how school staff work together to support students.
Strategic plan	References to district strategic plan.
System portraits	Engagement with district learner, adult, and system portraits.
<i>Teacher Perspectives</i>	
Teacher agency	Refers to teachers' discretion around curriculum use and instructional practices.
Teacher barriers to ML support	Barriers that may exist for teachers to use best practices to support MLs.
Teacher emotions	Teacher emotions including joy, stress, exhaustion, etc.
Teacher feedback and support	Referring to professional feedback and support that teachers receive to promote professional development and learning.
<i>Data Gathering and Use</i>	
Assessment	Referring to specific evaluations conducted by the school and district (e.g. to classify the language skills/proficiency levels of students).
Demographic information	Referring to specific demographic information of students that is collected and shared.
<i>District/School Culture Towards MLs</i>	

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Code	Definition
Cultural artefacts	Classroom or school objects that reflect the home language and culture of ML students.
ML cultural knowledge and background	How the home language and culture of ML students are represented and incorporated in school or district events.
Culturally responsive curriculum	Refers to curriculum and instructional practices in the classroom that incorporate and value the cultural and linguistic diversity of MLs
<i>ML Specific</i>	Double code with content when specifically referring to ML students for all sections.
<i>Family Relations</i>	
District and school efforts	Efforts by the district, school, or teachers to engage and communicate.
Family agency	Refers to how families engage and communicate with school and district staff to address concerns/needs.
Family communication	Communication between school/teacher and the family/student to learn about student and family needs and assets, and/or communicate plans for learning.
<i>SPED Referral Process</i>	
Assessment/testing	Specific assessments and testing procedures used by school staff to identify if ML students require special education services.
Intervention	Refers to specific interventions designed to support ML students who may be referred for SPED.
Pattern of dual identification	Refers to understanding of the significant number of students who are identified as both ML and have a disability/require special education services.
Process redesign	Refers to how the SPED referral process could change or adapt to better support ML students and families.
<i>Research</i>	
ML Project	Refers to specific district and school involvement with the ML project.
Research-practice partnership	Refers more generally to the RPP between district and university, beyond the ML project. May include discussion of teacher researcher collaborative, principal meetings, etc.

## Appendix B. Examples of Coded Excerpts

Parent Code	Child Code	Example
Leadership	Approach	'I'm very much a shared leader. I believe in collaborative leadership structures ...'
	Critical consciousness	'... in the hopes of creating schools that support families like mine and understanding how education works and understanding how to access higher education or trade schools or just careers in general, so that our students and their families have access to opportunities that they might not necessarily be familiar with.'
	Emotions	'... I started to realize that that is something that I'm passionate about. And I feel like I could hopefully make a difference.'
	Identity	'... as an English Learner, I feel I bring in a different lens to the table.'
	Moves	'I had to be strategic about bringing some of my own initiatives into the conversation, because at the end of the day, it's all about, how do you prioritize, and you don't want to overwhelm the community, either.'
	Path	'... I'm a bilingual certified teacher. And actually, I taught in the classroom for 14 years.'
	Reflection	'It's always good to reference the fact that I've walked a mile in pretty much every elementary teacher's shoes. And that matters, right? Because it means that I am

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Continued.

Parent Code	Child Code	Example
System Infrastructure	Accountability	empathetic to the experiences that they have and the challenges that they're faced with and some of the positive outcomes for students when the learning pathway is clear in the classroom.'
	Coherence	'... we need to utilize what we have, we need to follow the law, we have to follow the ELD standards ...'
	Curriculum use	'One thing that we need in the district is coherence and consistency. And I think that, we have a lot of initiatives, we have to be very careful with bringing in way too many. We always talk about, you know, how the other plate is full or not. And, you know, if I put on my principal's hat, it could be a lot, right?'
	District collaboration	'Another approach is to show the relationship between universal design for learning practices, and how we implement the benchmark ELA and ELD curriculum.'
	District reforms	'... There's a team of us that are meeting together to talk about what we should cover during those weeks. So the principals will have the ability to control that time and say, Okay, what are we going to discuss? And we're just working on aligning it so that all the schools do similar things like data talks, strategy conversations, so that everybody's moving in that same direction instead of everybody kind of doing what they need to do during that time.'
	Dual language programmes	'MTSS and UDL and deep learning and science of reading and, you know, GLAD ... There's probably a million I'm forgetting. And it's hard as an educator, either in the classroom or even an administrator at a site level, to take all those things and try to make sense of where they all fit, and what to do.'
	ELD resource teacher	'We're a 50/50 program and so we have two classes in kindergarten, two classes of 26. And then we're just doing the rollout where they'll be moving up to first grade, and then we're adding two new classes at kindergarten next year. And so in five years, we'll have it at, through every grade.'
	Education transformation	'... one area that has really helped in the last few years is the position of the ELD resource teacher that every school has. And so a big part of their job is to engage in professional development with our teachers. And so it's been really nice.'
	Fiscal resources	'... There needs to be a district expectation that our ELs have access to a college preparatory curriculum at every single high school, that our ELs have access to electives, and can really leverage strengths, interests, values and have access to athletics and visual and performing arts, that our ELs have access at the elementary school to both designated and integrated ELD ...'
	Institutional barriers	'... because we got a lot of that COVID relief funding, which allowed the district to hire learning support teachers is what we're calling them, essentially intervention teachers. And also, the multilingual department was able to hire teachers on special assignment.'
		'... another barrier that I didn't say that I probably should have said, is networks. We're not leveraging networks enough to support our students, right? [...] We're not the only district that's dealing with these situations and trying to figure out how to support our students. And are we having the opportunity to

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Parent Code	Child Code	Example
		network with those other districts to best serve students [...] we're not and it's not a district thing. Nobody is. And so we just are siloed. And I really wish we weren't.'
	Professional development	'So we were able to build out a collaboration cycle every three weeks. So every three weeks, this team of teachers would travel to each one of our three elementary schools. And we were able to pull our teachers during that time for two solid hours to give them professional development. We spent the majority of our time focusing on ELs, so setting up for what is designated ELD, what does that even look like? And then what are the instructional practices that would be really effective?
	School collaboration	'... how do we collaborate to make sure that we're talking about kids and using data to inform our practices. So I took the time to align our work and get everybody to kind of reset on good instructional practices.'
	Strategic plan	'So this is our goal for the district. What does that look like in terms of the actions that we're going to take and the resources that are going to fund those actions? And so it was done purely as a way to educate and to really make it live instead of just to check the box like we're getting it done, we really wanted to say like, this is our strategic plan. And here's what it looks like.'
	System goals	'Our learner [goals] focuses on the human and the capacity of that human to be a learner. So from a language acquisition perspective, that matters because all of our English Learners bring assets to the classroom, and most of them are never leveraged.'
Teacher Perspectives	Teacher agency	'I just make it my own. I just take it and then I just take the theme and take the lesson and take the objective and then just spin it on my own.'
	Teacher barriers to ML support	'... we have teachers who are still teaching like they have no English Language Learners in their classrooms. And so how can we shift their minds to make sure that they see accurately who's in there, and then adjust their instruction to better meet the needs of their students that are there and not the students that were there 20 years ago when they started out of school.'
	Teacher emotions	'... and so I saw a lot of fear in some teachers in, well, I don't know how to do this, or I'm afraid of doing groups and letting kids talk because they're going to take over ...'
	Teacher feedback and support	'As the teacher, of course, I treat you as the professional that you are. And I want you just to see that we're constantly learning and trying and having those conversations together. So we get used to just those cycles of feedback after we try to implement something, what's the feedback that I'm going to receive? And it's not, you know, getting feedback, that criticism, it's not bad either to get like suggestions, and when you get good feedback, that is great. But there's always those opportunities just like, what's that next step then, for myself?
Data Gathering and Use	Assessment	'... they do have a platform... Teachers go in, they may do some kind of assessment there that looks at, you know, their language skills. And, you know, they have to fill out the form. And that is something that the

*(Continued)*

Continued.

Parent Code	Child Code	Example
		multilingual department takes care of, they look at that data ...'
	Demographic Information	'... when we do registration, they have to identify, like, the language that they want their correspondence in. And so, we have all of that in our student database system.'
District/School Culture Towards MLs	Cultural artefacts	'... there's student work on the walls everywhere. And there's a lot of opportunities, we're talking about the diverse backgrounds that come from everybody and that work is all over the classrooms'
	Cultural knowledge and background of ELs	'... like this Wednesday is Mexican Mother's Day[...]they're doing events around that, they're celebrating it all this Wednesday, inviting a few families in, who are going to talk about what it means to them ...'
	Culturally responsive curriculum	'... now teachers are actively doing cultural activities in their classrooms, to access experiences that students have that may be different from those of the teacher. And so I feel like it's kind of shifting to be not just welcoming, but celebratory.'
	ML Specific	'We do have ELD teachers on special assignment that were provided for each school site. And they have specific roles, making sure that our students are appropriately receiving, for example, in the secondary areas, the courses that they should be in, and that we're monitoring them not only the reclassification process, but the monitoring of how they're progressing, even after they're reclassified. So having those EL, the resource teachers, I think, has definitely been key in supporting all students in K- 12.'
Family Relations	District and school efforts	'... we created family engagement liaisons for the purpose of being that bridge to parents that typically did not feel welcomed or comfortable on campus. And so one of the requirements was that all liaisons were required to speak Spanish.'
	Family communication	'We have like communication with parents, especially in their home language, is really important to us.'
	Family agency	'... I think our families don't necessarily always speak out. And because they're more silent, they tend to kind of just, okay, they're happy. But then our families that do come from high income households, they advocate and they go out and they're the loud voices. And so they make shifts based on sometimes that. And I feel like we need to find a way to hear the voice of our silent families a little bit more.'
SPED Referral Process	Assessment/testing	'... the majority of our teachers are not like, Oh, we got to test, we got to test. They really work hard to make sure that we go through the triads and keeping track of documenting the triad and then if we need to move to an SST and then follow the process, where we jump in to just test.'
	Intervention	'We just need to make sure that we are providing interventions at an early time, early identification of students who need the extra support, providing interventions early and resist jumping right to Special Ed testing.'
	Pattern of dual identification	'... just because a student isn't progressing doesn't mean that they need to be identified as a student with a disability, it just means we may need to try different tactics for that student. So a lot of the over identification of our English Learners as students with

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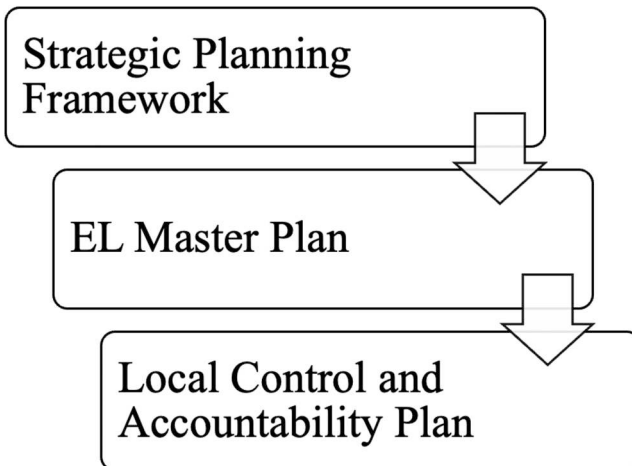
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Parent Code	Child Code	Example
	Process redesign	disabilities is because we need to build a strong tier one.’ ‘I think we need to have a really solid MTSS system of support. So teachers really need to know like, what’s great tier one, what’s great first teaching? And if students aren’t getting that, how do you then intervene, differentiate, you know, things like that.’
Research	ML Project	‘So that is called additive bilingualism. And so I saw evidence of that through [the ML] Project.’
	Research-practice partnership	‘I’m so interested in having the university researchers with us, because they can really shed light on and gather evidence, you know, and data from, what is the breakdown of language usage in the classroom?’

### Appendix C. Documents

Document	Strategic Planning Framework	District EL Master Plan	Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP)
Description of Document	A document that outlines the long-term vision for public education in the district, containing a summative vision statement, as well as goals for students developed in collaboration with the community. These effectively outline the desired competencies and attitudes required for successful learning in the district (LCAP, 2023).	A comprehensive document that compiles district policy and standards around ML needs. Following and directly citing the California state EL roadmap, as well as aligning with all federally required program monitoring processes through Title III of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the EL Master Plan articulates goals for multilingual learners, outlines the various programs and curricula the district makes available to support MLs. In addition, the EL Master Plan articulates ML identification criteria, assessment criteria, and teacher qualification criteria, as well as outlines the role of the ELAC & DELAC committees.	To be eligible to receive California’s Local Control Funding formula (LCFF) dollars, each year, every district across the state must annually prepare a Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP), a three-year strategic plan that outlines how the district will use and coordinate state funds to meet state learning and operational objectives. First introduced in 2013, these plans ensure students with the highest needs are prioritized in district spending. While the majority of the district’s LCFF grant funds are used to support general instructional activities at school sites, a significant portion of funds are designated by way of the LCAP to meet the board goals each year.

### *Relationship between key documents*



Note: The strategic planning framework creates the vision for public education in the district overall, setting key benchmarks for each programme, including for multilingual learners. Next, the EL Master Plan details how the benchmarks set by the strategic planning framework will be met, as well as how they will align with state and federal standards for funding each programme. Lastly, the LCAP details how state resources will be used to support students, and details both staffing, curricula, and other resources will be allocated to support MLs.