2023

Exploring School Leadership to Improve Graduation Rates for High School ELL Students in a Northeastern State

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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the review committee have been made.

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2023

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Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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May 2023

Abstract

English languages learners (ELLs) are the fastest-growing student population in the United States. Federal mandates, including the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, provide guidance and resources to states and local school districts to remove barriers for ELL students. Despite guidelines from one northeastern state to increase professional development, improve metrics to assess proficiency growth, and provide family outreach to support ELLs, school leaders have not achieved this goal of raising graduation rates for ELLs so they are comparable with their non-ELL peers. This project study uses a transformational leadership framework to explore perceptions of principals, assistant principals, and district-level ELL supervisors to improve high school graduation rates for ELLs. This basic qualitative study uses semi-structured interviews to examine challenges and perceptions of eight experienced school leaders working in the three largest school communities in one northeastern state to improve graduation rates of this population. This qualitative project study involved using descriptive and thematic coding to identify 12 themes, including case management, culture and climate, community engagement, instructional strategies, language acquisition, parent engagement professional development, student motivation, and teacher self-efficacy. Study results have implications for identifying culturally responsive teaching practices to improve student learning for all students, including ELLs. Results of this qualitative study were used to recommend policies to the state ELL advisory committee to improve support for high school leaders who work with large ELL student populations throughout the state.

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Dedication

I dedicate this qualitative project to Ms. Nancy Cant, an amazing teacher who never stopped learning and encouraged me always to reach higher.

Acknowledgments

First, I am grateful to Dr. Robert C. Flanders, my committee chair, for his continued support and encouragement as I pursued my doctoral degree. Thank you for never giving up on me.

I want to extend my sincere appreciation to my capstone committee members, Dr. Kathleen Kingston and Dr. Jean Sorrell, for their constant feedback and encouragement on this journal.

Thank You, Lindsay Gilbert, the student success advisor at Walden University, who provided me with a path toward reaching my goal.

I also want to thank the principals, assistant principals, and ELL supervisors who took the time to participate in my qualitative research study. I thoroughly enjoyed working with and learning from all of you.

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The Local Problem

English language learners (ELLs) are the fastest-growing student population in the United States (Soland & Sandilos, 2021). This student group is protected under federal legislation requiring all public schools to remove language barriers so ELLs can access academic learning (Mead & Paige, 2019). According to Edgerton (2019), The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 guides school districts in terms of providing resources and support with college and career readiness skills for all students. This legislation emphasizes reducing the achievement gap among marginalized student groups, including ELLs, and places responsibility on states and local school districts to ensure all students have access to quality education.

The ESSA requires school leaders to support under-resourced student populations, including ELLs, by aligning resource allocation and professional teacher learning with supporting language and academic development. and responding to the sociocultural needs of this growing population. It is important for high school principals to remove barriers for students to access college and career-ready academic content (Mitchell, 2020).

In response to ESSA guidelines, one northeastern state that is the focus of this qualitative study developed a three-strategy approach in 2017 to improve academic outcomes for all ELLs in the state. The first strategy involves personalized learning for all students, including meeting individual academic and language needs through language development programming, coteaching, and sheltered instruction. To achieve academic

growth, mainstream teachers are encouraged to understand critical concepts of incorporating sheltered instruction into their academic curriculum. School leaders are required to provide continuous training for all teachers in terms of teaching language development through academic content.

The second strategy requires school districts within the state to establish a metric for measuring annual growth and language proficiency. This northeastern state is part of the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) consortium composed of 35 other states and five countries. The ESSA requires states to ensure that ELLs make academic state testing gains in Reading, math, and science. Upon arrival to the U.S., ELLs are only assessed in mathematics. After 12 months of living and learning in the U.S., students participate in additional academic testing, including reading and writing (Molle & Wilfrid, 2021).

Enhancing family outreach and community support is the third strategy of the state's comprehensive plan. Reauthorization of the ESSA involved supporting under-resourced student populations, including migrant and immigrant families. Schools are expected to provide outreach services to help strengthen students' family support networks and help provide safe and nurturing home and community environments leading to growth and self-actualization for all students.

Since 2017, school leaders across the northeastern state have incorporated these three principles into their leadership practices by increasing professional development, improving ELL assessment protocols, and making data-driven decisions for responding to student needs, as well as creating community partnerships to respond to the

socioeconomic and cultural needs of immigrant and refugee families to help students overcome other barriers to accessing their education.

The problem is that despite employing strategies, which include increased professional development for teachers, improved assessment metrics, and community outreach services to families put in place by school administrators in three urban high school districts in one northeastern state to support ELLs, graduation rates for this population have not improved. According to the state's Department of Education (n.d)., ELLs are at a greater risk of dropping out and not finishing high school unless schools provide effective support to meet their language and academic needs. In 2019 the state's graduation rate for ELL students was 59.98%, compared to 87.9% for non-ELL graduates. Between 2017 and 2019, ELL four-year high school graduation rates decreased in two of the three largest school districts. These trends parallel similar phenomena in other parts of the country with high concentrations of ELLs. According to Johnson (2019), ELLs, including long-term ELLs continue to struggle to become college and career ready, which impacts high school graduation rates.

Transformational leadership is an effective practice that supports under-resourced student populations of ELLs (Lion & Matias, 2018; Messmann et al., 2022). This leadership method involves employing a collaborative approach that encourages trust and respect across all stakeholders, focusing on individual learning needs of students and teachers, and empowering educators to become creative problem solvers. Transformational schools meet unique needs of their students through professional

collaboration, motivation, accountability, and individualized attention (Liou & Bornstein, 2018).

Rationale

In one northeastern state, ELLs are more than four times more likely to drop out of high school compared to their non-ELL peers. In 2019, this northeastern state had a student population of 177,000 students enrolled in preschool through 12th grade. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2022), 2.9% of the student population within this northeastern state are identified as ELLs. The state's ELL population is diverse and represents families who speak over 137 languages. The language needs of this population vary. This state has seen an increase in newcomer ELL students who have been in the U.S. for less than a year. Additionally, According to Gula (2021), approximately 25% of the state's ELL students were born in the U.S. but continue to struggle with accessing instructional content in English.

Most of the state's ELL population is concentrated in three communities in the southern part of the state (Gula, 2021). Immigrant families from all parts of the world reside within the three largest school communities, which have become a resettlement site for refugee families. Since 2012, the northeastern state within this study has welcomed 3,029 refugees. Most refugee families settling within the state have come from Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Rwanda. The state's refugee population represents families from 24 different countries, of which most refugee student learners reside in three urban communities in the southern part of the state.

However, there has been minimal improvement in ELL graduation rates in the three largest school districts since the state adopted the revised ESSA plan. According to the state's school data transparency portal, two of the largest school districts saw a decrease in ELL graduation rates between 2018 and 2020. During that same period, two of the three school districts also saw an increase in dropout rates among ELLs

One approach that has been shown to foster positive learning cultures for under-resourced students is transformational leadership (James & Kitcharoen, 2021). Transformational leadership involves understanding needs and challenges of all students by developing relationships with stakeholders in communities, including ELL families, community members, students, teachers, and ELL case managers (Shields & Hesbol, 2020). Transformational leadership is based on four key principles*:* idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration. According to Sheilds and Hesbol, school-wide transformational leadership practices foster a school culture where teachers are empowered to meet students' individual needs and produce positive outcomes.

Transformational leaders empower educators to solve problems and address unique needs of their students. Through collaborative leadership, teachers engage in professional learning communities to learn from others and strengthen their skills (Messmann et al., 2022). Transformational schools also bring these same leadership principles into individual classrooms, where students are encouraged to solve their own problems, advocate for their learning needs, and learn from other students through mutual trust and respect (Liou & Bornstein, 2018).

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the perspectives of high school leaders from the three largest school districts in one northeastern state about challenges of increasing ELL graduation rates and resources and training teachers need, despite strategies put in place to improve student learning for ELLs. As part of the reauthorized ESSA of 2015, these strategies include increased professional development for teachers, improved assessment strategies, and community outreach services to families. This study included data via interviews with secondary school leaders, including high school principals, assistant principals, and district-level ELL supervisors from the three largest school districts in one northeastern state, and uses the four key principles of transformational leadership as its framework.

Definitions of Terms

The following terms are used in this study:

English language learners (ELLs): Students who cannot communicate or effectively learn English because English is not their first language. ELLs may struggle with one or more language domains. Students identified as ELLs often require specialized instruction or support in terms of accessing academic education (Molle & Wilfrid, 2021).

Sheltered Instruction: Content teachers use specialized instruction to teach language development through content instruction (Desjardins, 2020).

Significance of the Study

The high school graduation rate for ELLs is significantly lower in one northeastern state compared to their non-ELL peers. In 2019, ELL high school students

were four times more likely to drop out of high school in this state. In 2020, the second-largest school district in the state entered a settlement agreement with the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ). Among the concerns listed by the DOJ was failure to properly remove language barriers for ELL students and adequately provide college and career readiness skills to this population before graduation.

This study is significant because the results can fill a gap in practice by informing high school principals and assistant principals as well as ELL district office supervisors about the most significant challenges influencing low graduation rates for ELL high school students and what resources are needed to assist these learners in graduating high school. Positive social change will result from increased graduation rates for this population. Improving graduation rates of ELLs can lead to closing the social gap between ELLs and non-ELLs. According to Evans and Hartshorn (2021), improved education results in improved social mobility, intergenerational mobility, and financial gains.

Research Questions

Two research questions were generated to explore perspectives of high school leaders from the three largest school districts in one northeastern state about the challenges of increasing ELL graduation rates, and providing the resources and training teachers need, despite strategies put in place to improve graduation rates. This study involved addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: What do school administrators perceive as the most significant challenges that influence low graduation rates for high school ELLs?

RQ2: What are administrators' perceptions of resources and supports needed to help high school ELL students graduate?

Review of the Literature

Literature reviews include a comprehensive review of background information, scholarly research, and data regarding a specific topic (Walter & Stouck, 2020). As ELLs continue to enroll in public schools around the country, the achievement gap between immigrant children and non-ELL peers is significant (Soland & Sandilos, 2021). This section includes in-depth background information regarding historical, political, developmental, and cultural influences that affect school leaders' roles in terms of removing language barriers to promote academic readiness for ELLs in high school. This literature review includes discussions of critical federal legislation that supports and protects the rights of ELL students in public education. Several landmark cases by the U.S. Supreme Court and other federal courts are critical to understanding the school's current role in providing appropriate measures to protect this growing population and ensure all students have access to quality education. I also provided important background information on transformational leadership and explored how school leaders have work with various stakeholders to support academic readiness for this population.

This literature review includes seminal research of Stephen Krashen and Jim Cummins to provide a comprehensive understanding of complexities involving secondary acquisition of language development, which includes the development of social language skills and cognitive academic vocabulary. One of the challenges for ELLs at the high school level is difficulties involved with developing academic language proficiency while

at the same time building college readiness skills needed for graduation. The literature review includes school leader perspectives regarding closing the achievement gap between ELL and non-ELL students.

Literature Research Strategy

When I first started researching the topic of ELLs, it was necessary to define search parameters. During my literature search I used Google Scholar, Thoreau and EBSCO Host via Walden University. The initial searches revealed 44,610 entries published between 1920 and 2022 involving ELLs. Using the terms *ELL, ESOL (English to Speakers of Other Languages), ESL (English as a Second Language), LEP (Limited English Proficiency),* and *multilingual learners* increased the number of available entries to 181,465. To narrow down the list of sources relevant to my study, I narrowed the topic in EBSCO Host by focusing on academic readiness and high school graduation rates.

As school leaders face daily challenges involving supporting ELLs at the high school level, their roles as instructional leaders are influenced by local, state, and federal policies. This literature review includes information about the impact of federal legislation, state guidance, and resource allocation at state and federal levels on school leadership and decision-making. State and federal legislation influence best practices to support ELLs.

For this literature review, I compiled sources which were relevant to this study to provide background knowledge involving challenges school leaders face when responding to educational needs of ELLs at the high school level. These challenges include how school leaders navigate political and legal influences to remove barriers for

ELLs as well as models for second language acquisition. The literature review also includes information about key language acquisition theories, including Krashen's monitor theory on second language acquisition and Cummins' theory of second language acquisition theory. I also provided background information about the project study and school leader roles in terms of using transformational leadership practices and techniques to address challenges in terms of supporting ELL language academic and sociocultural needs.

Conceptual Framework

Transformational leadership grew out of moral leadership theory. According to Burns (1978), sustainable social change needs to come from dynamic relationships where individuals learn and share. Transformational leaders foster a culture where individual can share their ideas and concerns. Organizational leaders also focus on improving individual employees rather than solely focusing on the organization's mission. Burns also emphasized that moral leadership in fostering a collaborative organization.

Transformational leadership involves shared decision-making practices within education systems and empowering teachers to lead, share, and teach others. Transformational school leaders empower teachers and students to solve challenges and voice their individual needs to achieve creative collective goals (Shields & Hesbol, 2020). Transformational school leaders foster a community of mutual trust and respect by acknowledging four principles within their school community (Peng et al., 2021). The first principle, idealized influence, refers to modeling and setting a high standard for all members in the organization. Inspirational motivation encourages others to perform at

their best (Messmannn et al., 2022). Intellectual stimulation fosters creativity, problem solving and innovation (Liou & Bornstein). Finally, individual consideration refers to transformational leaders continually assessing individual needs of students and teachers regularly and seek out innovative solutions to improve individual learning (Liou & Bornstein, 2018).

According to Peng et al. (2021), transformational leadership elicits more positive attitudes and collaboration in terms of organizational change. Individuals in the study were less cynical or resistant to changes in the structure of their roles. Transformational leadership practices can be used to establish a clear vision and set a structured pathway for reaching organizational-wide goals and overcoming challenges that may inhibit growth, productivity, and achievement.

Messmannn et al. (2022) evaluated independent workforce behavior and work habits of individual teachers across 10 public schools over one year, and evaluated transformational leadership practices by examining teacher autonomy, readiness, and self-efficacy independent variables. The study revealed positive correlations between two variables, autonomy and readiness.

Individual consideration is vital to producing positive outcomes within school organizations, and transformational leadership involves focusing on students' unique academic and social needs to support the whole child (Lion & Matias, 2018). The metrics for success are created and maintained by the school community. Lion and Matias (2018) explored ways in which school leaders demonstrate the moral courage and willingness to constantly evaluate relational dynamics between school hierarchy and immigrant

families. This study reinforced how it is important for school leaders acknowledge the shortcoming of their own organization and make changes in to meet evolving needs of communities and families; therefore, transformational leadership has successfully strengthened impoverished school communities because they involve using creative problem-solving strategies to improve achievement and meet all learners' academic and social needs.

Burns (1978) argued leaders need to understand all sides of an argument to better solve challenges within organizations. According to Setyaningsih and Sunaryo (2021), transformational leadership practices, self-efficacy, and job satisfaction positively affect teachers' commitment to the teaching profession. School leaders can apply transformational leadership practices to understanding challenges and needs of ELLs and working with all stakeholders to improve problem-solving and decision-making strategies and meet the educational needs of this student group.

According to Liou and Bornstein (2018), transformational leadership practices are an effective approach for engaging and supporting under-resourced learners. It helps foster school communities that are solution focused. Teachers are encouraged to identify new ideas and take on leadership roles within schools to support learning. Transformational leadership also builds trust and mutual respect among all stakeholders in school communities and encourages collaboration. In transformational school communities, teachers can implement trust, respect, and collaboration within their own classrooms to develop student leaders (Erdel & Takkac, 2020).

This qualitative study explores the perceptions of school leaders who work directly with high school ELLs and teachers who serve this population. The transformational leadership theory will guide this basic qualitative research study using it's four key principles: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration. The principles were embedded into the semi structured qualitative interviews to capture high school principals, assistant principals and ELL supervisors' understanding of transformational leadership as it relates to supporting their ELL population's learning needs in their schools.

Literature Review

ELLs have become the fastest-growing student population in the U.S. Most ELL students in U.S. schools come from Spanish-speaking and lower socioeconomic families (Estrada & Wang, 2018). ELLs struggle to learn the complexities of the English language while simultaneously striving to understand literature, mathematics, science, social studies, health and wellness, and the arts until developing language proficiency skills and academic vocabulary needed to succeed. Families of ELLs struggle to advocate for access to quality education due to their lack of English proficiency and familiarity with the American school system (Johnson, 2019).

Historical Context

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was the first legislation that addressed inequities in schools among English-speaking and non-English speaking children and mandated English language access for all (Everson & Hedges, 2019). The Civil Rights Act required school districts to provide specialized services like direct language

instruction. Title VI protects immigrant children from discrimination, harassment, and denial of language development services.

After the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the federal government established the Equal Education Opportunities Act (EEOA) of 1974 and Title III Act to ensure all children received a quality education. According to Mead and Paige (2019), the EEOA requires school districts to take appropriate actions to remove language barriers. It requires local school leaders to adopt researched educational methods and provide proper resources and staff.

The court case, Lau V. Nichols (1974), is one of the most influential US Supreme Court cases involving access to learning for ELLs. In a school district in San Francisco in 1971, a school community had an influx of 2,800 non-English speaking students of Chinese descent. The school district refused to provide supplemental language support to help students access the curriculum. In 1974, the Supreme Court ruled under the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that schools must provide all students with quality education. The key question addressed by the court was whether a school district violates the fourteenth amendment or Civil Rights Act of 1964 if it fails to provide supplemental language instruction for ELLs. The Supreme Court ruled that equality in education does not necessarily mean quality education for student groups like ELL students. Schools that receive federal funding are expected to provide students with access to academic content through instructional strategies like ELL sheltered instruction, bilingual education, and direct language instruction classes.

Title III of the ESEA of 1965

Title III was introduced under the ESEA of 1976. Title III legislation provides funding to local school districts for ELL and special education programming. The legislation mandates school districts to support ELLs in terms of acquiring language proficiency and academic standards (Skinner & Library of Congress, 2019). Title III removes barriers that prevent students from engaging in meaningful learning experiences. It also protects students from schools placing ELL students in low academic levels or special education programs due to limited English proficiency. The Title III law also allocates resources to translate memos and communications into languages that are understandable by immigrant families. Local school districts are required to provide translation services for meetings and conferences with parents and allow school districts to access bilingual staff or contract translation agencies.

The Supreme Court emphasized simply being in a mainstream classroom with peers does not necessarily lead to access to academic content. The ruling also states that all schools, regardless of their instructional approach, provide supplemental English instruction for ELLs to meet equal educational opportunities for all students. Lau v. Nichols reaffirmed that students could not receive a quality education if they could not understand the language. However, the EEOA of 1974 that came out of Lau v. Nichols did not give direct guidance to the states. It also lacked enforcement powers (Vohra, 2019).

Castaneda v. Pickard (1981) strengthened the role of the EEOA by establishing a three-point system to evaluate the effectiveness of local ELL programs under state and

local districts. The U.S. Fifth Court of Appeals stated schools are required to support ELL programming by providing research-based practices to teach the curriculum using sound teaching pedagogies that focus on helping students overcome language barriers (Sutton et al., 2012).

Guiding States to Respond

The rulings of Lau v. Nichols and Castaneda v. Pickard have been vital in terms of guiding school leaders in supporting ELLs (Lau v. Nichols, 1974; Sutton et al., 2012). Local school districts provide support for newcomer students when they first arrive from another country, but also for long-term ELLs, many of whom were born in the U.S. The learning needs of these two student ELL subgroups differ. Due to federal policy, it is important for school leaders to ensure ELL students are taught and assessed by qualified instructors. For example, ELL students enrolled in sheltered content courses are expected to be taught and evaluated by teachers certified in specific content areas. The EEOA and ESSA guide states and local school districts in terms of protecting the rights of all ELLs (Edgerton, 2019).

Allocating resources to adequately support special programming like English learning development programs is essential for school leaders with larger ELL populations. Many states have resource allocation formulas that reimburse a portion of costs for students with specific learning needs, but these costs are not distributed equally, and often larger districts struggle to fund adequate ELL and special education programming to support student needs (Jiménez-Castellanos & García, 2017).

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001

Despite the federal government's progress toward providing funding and guidance for ELLs, Title III legislation funding is limited. In 2001, Congress passed No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. This legislation did not accurately base the funding formula on the amount of time students need to become proficient in terms of academic language development. Students need 5 to 7 years before accessing high-level academic content (Alexander, 2017). Despite passing language proficiency exams, immigrant children in American schools continued to struggle academically even after meeting criteria to exit the ELL program (Alexander, 2017). ELL students needed continued support even after reaching language proficiency (Alexander, 2017).

ESSA

There have been many revisions to the Title III legislation. Title III of No Child Left Behind has shifted from focusing solely on English instruction toward a comprehensive and meaningful education. The Every Student Succeeds Act replaced NCLB in 2015 (Mitchell, 2020). In 2015 Congress approved $844 million for Title III funding to compensate for student cost increases and inflation. Since 2015, the federal government has not provided more than $737 million. This cost averages about $150 per student. In 2020, economists identified that $1.2 billion would be needed to adequately support Title III programming (Education Department Budget History 1980-2019, 2018). Under President Obama's Leadership, Title III under ESSA established more focus on monitoring and assessing the language development growth of ELL students through annual progress measures. As federal requirements pressured local school

districts to show growth in English language development, many communities have moved away from bilingual education programs that focused on access to content but not growth in language proficiency (Rissler, 2018).

Under ESSA, each state is required to establish clear metrics for measuring growth in language proficiency and set protocols for using data to improve instructional practices (Callahan et al., 2022). Under the *No Child Left Behind and ESSA*, the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment consortium was established to provide multilingual instructional resources, language development standards, and assessments to measure proficiency growth and benchmarks for ELLs' proficiency growth. Federal policy mandates that states show annual proficiency growth for all ELLs.

The WIDA consortium encompasses 41 states and provides placement tests and annual proficiency to assess students' ability to access academic content using English. These assessments are based on the "Framework for Equitable Instruction" and assess students' oral, written, and reading skills to access grade-level academic content (Molle & Wilfrid, 2021). The challenge King and Bigelow (2018) share is that most assessments do not consider the students' developmental or specific learning needs. ELLs are often classified by proficiency scores ranging from a one to a six without regard to their learning styles or developmental needs.

Second Language Acquisition Theories

Under ESSA, the state improvement plan in one northeastern state requires all school districts to employ research best practices for ELLs by focusing on teacher professional development (The U.S. Department of Education, 2022). Many best

practices for language development stem from second language development theories. Two primary theorists in this field include Stephen Krashen and Jim Cummins (Cardoza & Brown, 2019; Krashen,1982). Both researchers focus on academic language development and are used by school districts in establishing language development programs to quicken academic language acquisition.

Krashen's Monitor Theory

Krashen (1982) identified five unique hypotheses that support second language development. The Acquisition Learning Hypothesis refers to students needing adequate language learning time. The more exposure students have to a second language, the more vocabulary and grammar students acquire. In the Modeling Hypothesis, modeling teaches students the rules of language, focus, and form. When students make mistakes in speaking or writing, they are redirected by the instructor before moving forward. The Natural Order Hypothesis states that children learn a language in a specific order. Speaking and listening skills often come before more complex communication skills like reading and writing. Students learn to speak and write in simple sentences before understanding and using more complex sentence structure. Input Hypothesis focuses on how students acquire complex language skills. According to Krashen, language development teachers scaffold more complex language upon language skills that the student already knows. The Affective Filter Hypothesis states that students are motivated intrinsically or extrinsically to learn a second language. ELLs without motivation can never fully master proficiency in a second language.

For the past forty years, Krashen's monitors has been questioned. Opponents argue with the idea that extrinsic motivation to learn a second language holds no validity because an individual's primary language development is not dependent on extrinsic rewards. Critics also discredit Krashen's input hypothesis because his work struggles to explain comprehensive output measures in acquiring a second language. Additionally, Krashen fails to explain how language is an acquisition process rather than a learned function. Perhaps the biggest argument against Krashen's monitor theory is the natural order hypothesis because languages worldwide possess different grammar rules, structures, and syntax.

Cummins' Model for Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency

Many ELL programs follow the theoretical framework of Jim Cummins, who delineates two primary types of language development. Basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) involve social language skills. ELLs use the social language daily to interact with peers, ask for assistance, and navigate daily needs. Most students acquire these essential communication skills one to three years after arrival. Cummins attests that cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP), is the more complex type of language development. Students use cognitive language skills to access more complex academic content such as the language needed for high school instruction in courses like U.S. History, Biology, and Algebra. According to Cummins, CALP development can take anywhere from seven to ten years and is required for students to achieve and demonstrate college and career readiness (Cardoza & Brown, 2019).

Best Practices in Language Development Programming

As federal legislation places the responsibility for removing language and learning barriers on individual states and school districts, states have taken advantage of using evidence-based best practices. There are several types of approaches school leaders have implemented to provide ongoing learning for ELLs, including bilingual education, dual immersion programs, English language development instruction, and sheltered content instruction. It is important for school leaders to improve the level of training for staff and state laws around bilingual services being used in public education.

Sheltered Instruction

Following the federal guidelines of Title III, The Equal Education Opportunity Act, and most recently, ESSA of 2015, states are required to adopt research-based practices to support ELLs in the academic center (Mitchell, 2020). According to Desjardins (2020), school leaders should understand second language acquisition to develop strategies that best meet the needs of their students. In 2019, Arizona was the only state to adopt English only laws in public schools; therefore, Arizona school districts could not employ bilingual instruction. Coincidently, Arizona also has one of the lowest graduation rates for ELLs. In 2017, only 40% of ELL students from Arizona graduated high school, which is 25% less than the national average of ELL high school graduates.

According to Desjardins (2020), sheltered instruction involves building vocabulary and understanding grammatic structure so students can build upon their knowledge of the native language to learn English. One example of sheltered instruction is applying cognates or words that sound like native terms and have similar meanings to

help build a strong vocabulary. Another advantage of ELL students learning in mainstream classrooms is that students have access to role modeling by other peers. One mixed-methods study with Canadian high school immigrants found that providing ELL teens with role models with whom students could relate was likely to improve motivation to stay in high school and motivate them to work harder in high school (Pryce et al., 2019). With many high schools lacking teacher and faculty diversity, students often struggle to see themselves succeeding after high school or enrolling in college courses.

Bilingual Education

In states with significant numbers of ELL students, like California, New York, or Texas, schools have implemented various styles of bilingual education where students receive academic content in their native language for a portion of the day (Garza-Reyna, 2019). Bilingual education is not one size fits all, and there are various degrees of bilingual support with subtractive and additive approaches. As Spanish children dominate the ELL student population in the United States, research studies have shown the value of bilingual education in improving academic achievement scores. According to Garza-Reyna, nationwide, bilingual, and dual immersion programming is less common in secondary grade levels due to the cost of recruiting, hiring, and training bilingual teachers who are also certified content instructors.

Dual Immersion Programming

Dual immersion programs allow students to receive instructional content in both languages switching between English and their native language regularly. Dual immersion and bilingual education programs support learning in both the dominant and

native language, whereas sheltered English immersion programs fail to encourage language development in a student's native language. Cardoza and Brown (2019) found that students in treatment groups receiving dual immersion instruction gained more academic skills than those in control groups with only sheltered instruction.

Challenges for ELLs

Many factors beyond language development contribute to ELLs' challenges in securing academic readiness skills before leaving high school. In their qualitative case study, Sadeghi and Izadpanah (2018) identified three prominent themes that influence students' abilities to acquire reading skills to access academic content. These factors include time, motivation, and anxiety. Other secondary student concerns were fear of punishment or embarrassment, lack of understanding of the American school system, and the failure of teachers' understanding of individual students' learning needs.

The time required to develop academic language skills to meet graduation requirements is a significant challenge for secondary school leaders. ELLs cannot learn educational content without acquiring the language skills for comprehension and output (Bunch & Martin, 2021). While ELL instructors help teach academic vocabulary and reading comprehension skills to comprehend complex literary text, mainstream teachers often lack the training to support language development through sheltered teaching practices.

Self-Efficacy and Motivation

Motivation is a factor that drives many students to engage in student learning, seek support from teachers and work hard to improve themselves. ELLs are no exception.

The factors behind an ELL's motivation may be different from their non-ELL peer. According to Roman and Nunez (2020), there are three types of student centered motivation; extrinsic, instrumental, and integrative. Roman and Nunez revealed that instrumental motivation, which involves working towards a goal or level of status, outweighed the other types of motivation for ELLs. The implications for this study include a better understanding of the challenges high school leaders face in school settings with large ELL populations to influence and motivate ELL students to engage in academic instruction when they have limited English proficiency and quickly become frustrated and less inclined to see success beyond high school.

Contreras and Fujimoto (2019) conducted extensive research examining the definition of college readiness for ELLs. According to their study, only 18% of ELL students attended college after graduating high school, and only 2% participated in Advanced Placement coursework while in high school. In a survey of 100 school districts in Southern California with high percentages of ELL students, most college-bound students started at a local community college. Several factors contributed to this influence in addition to language development, including lack of advocacy or mentoring, socioeconomic barriers, and lower self-efficacy or confidence in one's ability to push themself.

It is important for students to demonstrate academic, college, and career readiness skills to graduate high school. The term college readiness has been examined from various viewpoints. According to Lewis and Brown (2021), almost one-third of students entering undergraduate coursework require remediation. Accredited high schools hold

high expectations for all teachers and learners. School leaders expect high school graduates to have strong communication, problem-solving and critical thinking skills. Colleges expect students to possess self-management skills and be able to advocate for their learning. One of the driving forces in an ELL student's success is their self-efficacy or confidence to adapt, grow and improve their language development. One reason for such a high dropout rate among ELLs is low self-confidence in succeeding academically.

Soland and Sandilos (2021) evaluated self-efficacy scores in middle school Latino students correlated to math and reading achievement data. Their research revealed that even as reading and math scores increased, the self-efficacy scores remained lower for ELLs than their non-ELL counterparts. Increased academic achievement did not necessarily mean students felt more confident. Students who gain the proper support, motivation, and encouragement to see a college education is just as important as the need for high academic vocabulary.

Wang and Sun (2020) examined 74 research studies to evaluate the correlation between ELL language proficiency and academic achievement, with self-efficacy or belief in students' own capabilities to manage future challenges. The effect sizes from their meta-analysis found a positive correlation between language proficiency and self-efficacy among ELLs. Wang and Sun's study encourages opportunities for future studies to explore how teachers can promote self-efficacy with reclassified ELL students.

Sociolinguistic and Cultural Influences

Sociolinguistics and cultural factors influence a student's motivation to develop self-efficacy toward academic success (Ouyang & Jiang, 2018). These factors include a

student's understanding of their native language, motivation to succeed in school, parent's educational background, language attitude, and language distance. Language distance refers to how different the language syntax, structure, or grammar rules differ between the native and target languages. Ouyang and Jiang found that students use interlanguage to acquire second language understanding to decode the target language. Their quantitative study evaluated the English proficiency results of high school Chinese students. The distance or overall differences in phonetics, grammar, and syntax between the two languages can predict how quickly a student can reach second language proficiency (Sun & Ng, 2021). For example, Spanish and French are closer to English than Mandarin. According to Artamonova (2020), language attitude also influences how motivated one is to work towards proficiency in learning a second language. The status language or value of learning a second language also affects motivation. Language status refers to how important or accepted a language is in the United States. In many parts of the United States, Spanish has an equal status to English; therefore, many students may not see the urgency in adopting the dominant language. Conversely, Urdu has a low status in most parts of the United States. Many students from Pakistan may become more motivated to focus on developing English skills to interact with their peers and the community in which they live.

Family influence greatly influences academic motivation. When immigrant families arrive in the United States, parents often evaluate the benefits and costs of acculturating into the dominant culture, including language development. Hirsch and Lee (2018) stated families evaluate the importance of becoming English proficient. Many

families worry that children may lose connection with their native language and their culture, history, music, literature, and the ability to communicate with family back in their home country grandparents. In some cases, parents may try and pull back on their children's acculturation in American schooling and using the dominant language or adopt aspects of American school culture, placing children in a loyalty bind and consequently leaving children stuck in a cultural or language war.

Role of Schools in Supporting ELLs in School

The challenges for school leaders in supporting college and career readiness for ELLs extend far beyond meeting language and academic needs. As our nation grows in diversity, it is common for immigrant families to arrive with significant language development gaps and bring various social and emotional challenges. Refugee children, undocumented families, and ELL unaccompanied minors have experienced famine, war, and sickness for years before coming to America (Cho et al., 2019). Educators struggle to support both the academic and social-emotional needs of these children. Previous studies explore how ELL students perform lower on standardized tests, have a higher dropout rate than their non-ELL counterparts, and experience more mental health challenges, including anxiety, depression, and substance abuse.

The reauthorization of ESSA has set priorities through state improvement plans to better support struggling student groups, including ELLs. The reauthorization of ESSA’*s* primary focus is to remove barriers to student learning. Under the legislation, each state is responsible for developing a comprehensive plan to address challenges in educating migrant children, at-risk students, ELLs, low socioeconomic students, and

homeless youth. States try to address these student needs through professional development opportunities, new pathways to post-secondary college and career opportunities, family engagement, socio-emotional learning programs, and an effective leadership structure (Edgerton, 2019).

According to Edgerton (2019), all states include ELLs in their accountability formulas. Beginner ELL students who are exempt from the state reading assessments had previously been exempted from all these reports but now must be included. States also standardize their process for identifying ELL students. School districts are required to report the home languages represented in the community and identify accommodations to support access to academic instruction for ELLs. Finally, states to adopt a metric for assessing language proficiency growth.

Instructional Accommodations

Instructional accommodations provide support for ELLs especially during state assessments (Rios et al., 2020). Some ELL accommodations include additional testing time or allowing bilingual dictionaries. Some states, like Nebraska, provide more accommodation than others. The influence of testing accommodations is not significant. In a meta-analysis examining the influence of ELL accommodation on performance assessments, Rios found that academic accommodations result in a minimal increase in student performance. These studies question the proper testing protocols used with ELLs on state assessments.

Reclassification

When students meet the minimum language proficiency standards set by the state, ELLs are often reclassified onto monitor status. Carlson and Knowles (2016) examined the impact ACT achievement scores have ELL reclassification, and college and career readiness. Their study revealed how ELL students who were reclassified prior to 10th grade produced higher ACT Reading scores than ELL students who were reclassified after grade 10. Students who exit from ELL direct services often struggle without daily language instruction support from their ELL instructors. Students who properly exit ELL services in earlier grades have advantages for acquiring college and career readiness by graduation.

Some local school districts use a combination of English language proficiency data and academic achievement to determine the classification status of ELL students. Currently, thirty states solely use English language proficiency data to decide whether students should be reclassified onto monitored status. Only 40% of ELLs reach monitored students because the exit criteria are so high and comprehensive. However, schools also risk releasing ELL students from direct ELL services too early because too many monitored students struggle to achieve academic readiness. Monitored students often need additional support to access the academic content in mainstream classes (Johnson, 2019).

Access to College and Career Readiness Curriculum

Since ESSA was revised, individual states are responsible for identifying evidence-based best practices to support ELLs. According to Callahan and Hopkins

(2017), ELLs are often prevented from taking higher-level academic math and science courses while enrolled in English language development classes. For example, according to Callahan and Hopkins, only 20% of ELLs complete Algebra 2 or other advanced math courses.

Contreras and Fujimoto (2019) explored the impact of policy in California concerning career readiness among ELLs. Contreras and Fujimoto conducted a qualitative document analysis involving 100 school districts in California. The qualitative data analysis revealed schools' critical responsibilities in securing resources from the state government to expand teacher professional development in understanding college readiness among ELLs. In addition to language development, ELL students require guidance in college application and access to a rigorous academic curriculum that supports college readiness. Contreras and Fujimoto's research confirms the importance of transformational leadership practices at both the district and state levels to ensure available supports are available to principals and teachers in supporting college and career readiness for high school ELLs.

Cultural Competency in School Leadership

According to He and Bagwell (2022), the language proficiency of immigrant families correlates to economic stability. Students' language skills also often correlate back to the language proficiency of their parents. It is important for school leaders to improve a family's language and socioeconomic needs to improve student academic achievement. He and Bagwell placed ownership on school leaders to address the social and cultural needs of ELL families within the community.

Multi-Cultural Learning Approach

Schools that embrace a multicultural approach in encouraging students to share their cultural values and norms associated with the school community have helped increase self-efficacy and improve mental wellness. Through their meta-analysis of 76 quantitative research studies, Wang and Sun (2020) revealed a direct correlation between higher self-efficacy scores and ELL student achievement. While Wang and Sun's effect sizes are not as significant as they predicted, and many factors influence the ease at which individuals acquire second language development, the researchers recommend looking at self-efficacy through additional qualitative research.

Sugarman (2021) explored the unique needs of ELLs in a post-pandemic climate. With more than a year of interrupted learning, the achievement gap between ELL and non-ELL peers has only increased. ELL families have experienced more financial loss and health complications from COVID than non-ELL peers. Additionally, schools that relied on remote learning during the pandemic saw ELL and other immigrant students struggle more with digital literacy affecting student learning and academic growth. As administrators strived to provide more professional development for educators during this time, teachers became more resistant to any added endeavors or responsibilities as they were already drowning under the pressures of delivering new and innovative ways to deliver curriculum via remote learning. As a result, school leaders struggle with shared responsibilities for supporting sheltered Instruction and English language development in the mainstream classroom.

Supporting ELLs Through Transformational Practices

Transformational leadership practices have been used to support the language and academic needs of ELLs in a both a whole school approach and individual classroom settings. Shields and Hesbol (2020) revealed how one school used transformational leadership practices to respond to demographic and diversity changes. As more minority children moved into the school district, school leadership responded by encouraging staff to respond to the individual learning needs of all learners. These transformational leadership practices include teacher workshops on meeting the needs of ELLs in the classroom and reallocating resources to provide ELL case management support.

Transformation leadership in education encourages teachers and faculty to become leaders within the school community and build leadership practices within individual classrooms. (DeDeyn, 2021). DeDeyn showed that one of the principles of transformational leadership, inspirational motivation, had the most significant effect on student outcomes compared to other leadership and non-leadership approaches.

Erdel and Takkac (2020) explored the impact of transformational leadership practices within the classroom to support the academic outcomes of ELLs. Their study examined the four principles of transformational leadership, idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, individual considerations, and inspirational motivation used to provide a more structured approach to acknowledging the unique learning needs to improve the writing skills of ELLs. The results revealed multiple supportive strategies from each element that provided social-emotional and academic skills development to foster academic readiness.

Implications

The implications of this qualitative research study support improved graduation rates for ELL high school students through transformational leadership practices. Focusing on individual students and staff needs allows for implementing new ideas and strategies to enhance student learning. ELLs bring unique learning needs both in and out of the classroom. School leaders strive to simultaneously address language and academic development and meet the challenges of acculturation and community need.

The literature review reveals how school leaders who use transformational leadership practices can improve student learning for under-resourced learners. Transformational leadership involves:

- Influencing all stakeholders to contribute more to the school community.
- Stimulating new ideas.
- Creating a school community that is problem-solving-focused.
- Building mutual trust and respect throughout.
- Recognizing the individual needs of both students and teachers.

This study used the four key principles of transformational leadership; idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration to support semi-structured in-depth interviews for the data collection. The literature reveals that ELLs possess unique learning needs, as academic language acquisition can take years to develop (Cardoza & Brown, 2019). Many factors also impact student motivation, influencing lower graduation rates (Roman & Nunez, 2020). The conceptual framework of transformational leadership has successfully addressed many of the issues

of under-resourced student populations, including ELLs (Liou & Bornstein, 2018). Transformational leadership practices can help school leaders identify challenges and seek solutions to reach ELLs by practiced shared leadership, focusing on individual learning needs and removing barriers to motivate students and teachers to use creative strategies to provide access to learning (DeDeyn, 2021). Transformational leadership also plays a role in encouraging educators to become leaders in their schools and share strategies with others to improve learning (Sheilds & Hesbol, 2020). The research questions are:

RQ1: What do school administrators perceive as the most significant challenges influencing low graduation rates for high school ELLs?

RQ2: What are administrators' perceptions involving resources and support needed to help high school ELL students graduate?

These research questions incorporated the framework's key principles to identify specific challenges and obstacles school leaders face in supporting the academic growth of ELLs and explore new resources, training opportunities, and strategies to improve high school graduation rates. These research questions led] the semi-structured qualitative interviewing and data collection from principals, assistant principals, and ELL supervisors from the three largest school communities which all have with significant ELL populations. Within this study, each school community presented similar challenges to meeting the needs of this growing population and laid out their specific needs to better meet the individual language, learning, and motivation needs to improve learning and engage educators in the process. The results of the study were shared with educational

stakeholders at the state level about the impact of adopting transformational leadership practices to support high school graduation rates for ELLs in urban school districts as part of a presentation to the state ELL advisory committee as part of the concluding project for this qualitative study.

This research study anticipates improved collaboration and decision-making practices in a school community. To help support this change, this project study seeks a policy change to the state legislature in providing additional supports to help school leaders better support the growing ELL population around the state. This study encourages school leaders to continue implementing interventions to provide more teacher training to support sheltered instruction, outreach support for ELL families, and improve English language development programing. All stakeholders can contribute to the overall improvement of a school community through effective leadership and transformational leadership practices.

Summary

Leadership plays an integral role in student learning. High school leaders, including principals and district-level supervisors, work with different stakeholders to meet all students' needs. Working with diverse student groups like ELLs can be particularly challenging because the learning needs are unique from non-ELL peers. Federal legislation like Title III and the Equal Opportunities Education Act have aimed to remove barriers for ELLs to access quality education (Mead & Paige, 2019; Skinner & Library of Congress, 2019). Federal guidance supports states in terms of identifying their own best practices for supporting this growing population. Section 1 includes information

about reforms to support ELLs in one northeastern state as leaders in this state continue to struggle to improve ELL graduation rates. This qualitative study involved using the transformational leadership theory as a framework to foster a climate of continuous improvement with shared responsibilities for all stakeholders. Studies regarding the influence of transformational leadership practices on student achievement, teacher effectiveness, and school climate in urban school settings were addressed in Section 1.

The literature review includes extensive background information relating to challenges and needs of ELLs at the high school level. SLA theories involve complexities in terms of accessing academic content for those with limited language proficiencies. Background literature included practical approaches to address the problem of academic readiness for ELLs. I used Krashen's monitor theory and Cummins' model for cognitive academic proficiency.

In addition to addressing language needs, it is important for school leaders to acknowledge challenges ELL students encounter (Mitchell, 2020). Motivation, self-efficacy, socioeconomics, and family culture all influence students' ability to successfully navigate through high school.

Transformation leadership served as the framework for this study. I explored how the transformational leadership theory plays an essential role in supporting academic growth and college readiness for multilingual learners at the high school level. I addressed effective approaches from school leaders involving closing the achievement gap between ELLs and non-ELL students. While schools respond to their ELLs' unique language and cultural needs, many school decisions are influenced by state and federal

policies and legislation. Additional literature related to the resources and supports to improve the graduation rates for English learners are located in Section 3.

Section 2 includes information about the research methodology, including data collection and analysis procedures. This basic qualitative research study involved using semi-structured qualitative interviews to explore perceptions of school leaders, including principals, assistant principals, and ELL supervisors in the three largest school communities in one northeastern state. Results of interviews were used to answer two research questions.

Section 3 includes a policy recommendation to be presented to the state ELL advisory committee in this northeastern state. The state ELL advisory committee or SELAC comprises educators, administrators, and community leaders who make recommendations for legislation and funding at the state level based on needs of ELLs. The goal of the policy recommendation was to provide additional support to school leaders in large school communities to increase ELLs' graduation rates based on the study's results.

Section 2: The Methodology

Research Design and Approach

Qualitative research involves obtaining and using data that are collected in naturalistic settings to explore or understand a specific phenomenon (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). For this qualitative project study, I used a basic qualitative research methodology involving in-depth-interviews to explore perspectives of high school principals, assistant principals, and district-level ELL supervisors from three school districts in one northeastern state about challenges of increasing ELL graduation rates and resources and training teachers need, despite strategies put in place to support ELLs. Basic qualitative research is used to help make sense of experiences and perceptions via detailed descriptions of individual perceptions about a particular topic (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). According to Worthington (2013), educational researchers frequently employ a basic qualitative research methodology in qualitative studies to improve educational practices and examine unique experiences through rich and detailed descriptions of opinions and perceptions.

A basic qualitative design was selected for this study because it allows participants to share firsthand experiences about a specific phenomenon, involving a particular group of participants, and requires a small sample size (Creswell, 2013). Two other qualitative research approaches were considered: case study and an ethnography design. The case study was not selected because they involve exploring a specific setting which makes generalizing results to larger populations more difficult. Ethnography studies require researchers to be immersed in the target population to experience what

they experience; this design was not a logical choice for this study because it is better suited for long term study and does not easily allow for exposure to multiple school settings over the short term.

For this basic qualitative study, I interviewed high school principals, assistant principals, and district-level ELL supervisors from the three largest districts in one northeastern state. To collect a large enough body of data, I conducted semi-structured interviews with eight school administrators across this setting. Semi-structured interviews involve using a set of predetermined questions to collect open-ended qualitative data from participants (Creswell, 2009).

Qualitative interviewing is a naturalistic approach to exploring phenomena involving a complex topic such as ELL graduation rates (Rubin & Rubin, 2021). All high schools within the setting under study contained significant ELL student populations ranging from 8.8% to 15% of their school populations. Nine semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix B) were used for this study. Semi-structured interviews allow researchers to prepare questions in advance and give respondents the flexibility to answer each question (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Qualitative interviewing involves exploring unique personal experiences of participants based on their roles, environment, and relationships with others (Rubin & Rubin, 2021). Individual semi-structured interviews provided were used to explore perceptions and opinions of school leaders about challenges and resources needed to improve graduation rates for ELL students. All interviews were recorded using a digital recorder and manually transcribed afterward.

This study involved the following research questions:

RQ1: What do school administrators perceive as the most significant challenges that influence low graduation rates for high school ELLs?

RQ2: What are administrators' perceptions of resources and supports needed to help high school ELL students graduate?

interview questions 1-2 were used to answer RQ1. Interview questions 3-9 were used to answer RQ2. Additionally, four critical principles of transformative leadership (idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration) were addressed when answering interview questions 3-9.

Participants

To explore perceptions of high school leaders about challenges and needs of ELLs to improve graduation rates in one northeastern state, I conducted eight semi-structured interviews with a sample of high school principals, assistant principals, and district-level ELL supervisors. The sample represented the three largest school districts in one northeastern state with the highest concentrations of ELLs.

This qualitative study involved focusing on gaining perspectives of high school leaders who work directly with ELLs and teachers as well as district-level supervisors who oversee ELL programming and professional development. This population shared their experiences involving working with this student population and provided insights in order to help improve graduation rates. All eight participants participated in semi-structured interviews which included rich and detailed information about their experiences and understanding of the problem.

Criteria for selecting participants for qualitative interviewing is essential in qualitative research. In addition to being accessible to the researcher and willing to share their experiences and perspectives, participants must have experience involving the phenomenon being studied (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). For my basic qualitative study, potential participants included high school principals, assistant principals, and district-level ELL supervisor school supervisors working in one of the three largest school districts in one northeastern state with at least one year of professional experience as administrators in their current position. Potential participants were expected to directly support learning for ELLs or supervise teachers who instruct ELLs in their classrooms. All participants in the sample came from school districts with ELL populations that were at least 8% of the total student population. School administrators with less than one year of administration experience at the high school level did not have sufficient experience involving the phenomenon; therefore, they were excluded from the participant sample.

For my basic qualitative study, I accessed participants by sending electronic invitations to school email addresses. After receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from Walden University to conduct the study, I sent invitations electronically to those who met participant selection criteria. To identify potential participants who served as high school administrators or district office ELL supervisors, I accessed district and school websites for each of the three school districts in the study. District and school websites had contact information for school faculty, including administrators. Thirty potential participants worked in six high schools and three district offices in the northeastern state's three largest school districts.

As part of the interview protocol, I followed up with personal phone calls one week after receiving a positive response to confirm their participation and set a mutually agreed date and time for the interview. Since the participants for this study came from three school districts, I took it upon myself to travel to their location after school. The electronic invitation included the requirements for participation, the rationale for the research, and the researcher's contact information. I accepted the first eight participants who volunteered to participate. Electronic invitations were emailed to each potential participant's school email address. This study contains a copy of the invitation in Appendix C.

The interview protocol includes several steps as outlined by Creswell and Creswell (2018). The protocol involves establishing a trusting relationship with the participants by asking introductory and preliminary questions to better understand the experience of each participant. The nine content interview questions in Appendix B served as the data collection instrument. Questions 3-9 incorporate the four principles of transformational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration. Probing questions helped to expand upon or clarify responses made by participants. After the interview, the researcher reviewed the rights of the participants and shared the next steps in analyzing the data and sharing the results with the participants after the study.

All participation was voluntary. The researcher informed the participants that all interviews were recorded and transcribed as part of the data collection process. Walden University requires the researcher to keep the identities of all research participants

confidential. I emailed all participants a summary of the transcriptions after the data were collected and analyzed to help strengthen internal validity through member checking. Each participant signed a letter of consent (see Appendix D) explaining the rights and responsibilities of the researcher and participants, and how the data were collected and used in the capstone study. All the notes and data collection sources remain confidential, as stated in the *Walden University Guidebook*.

Data Collection

This qualitative project study used qualitative interviewing of high school leaders and ELL district-level supervisors in the three largest school districts in one northeastern state as its sole data collection source; therefore, the researcher served as the primary data collection research instrument. The interview protocol establishes predetermined open-ended questions based on evidence-based research. Following this protocol, I developed nine semi-structured interview questions in Appendix B. Each interview question is grounded in one of the two research questions for this proposed basic qualitative study.

To collect a large enough body of data, I followed the interview protocol and developed an interview script consisting of nine content questions focused on understanding the perceptions and challenges of high school leaders to improve graduation rates for ELLs. Using thematic analysis, I used thematic coding to analyze the data collected from the interviews with each participant and identify common patterns to develop themes (Saldaña, 2016).

The interview protocol provides a clear, concise plan for conducting each qualitative interview in a meaningful, comfortable, and unbiased manner (Creswell &

Creswell, 2018). The structure for each interview first involved a pre-interview phone conversation for the researcher to introduce himself and thank each participant for volunteering to participate in the study. The researcher explained the purpose of the qualitative study, the research methodology, and how the data collected from the participants would be used in the study. On the day of the interview, the interviewer reserved the interview space set up prior to the participant's arrival. At the start of the interview, the researcher provided the consent form for each participant to read and sign. The researcher also confirmed that the participant was comfortable having a digital recorder to record the meeting.

The initial questions of the interview reviewed basic information about the interview. The preliminary questions helped the researcher understand the school leader's specific role and responsibilities in supporting ELLs in their school or district. These opening questions helped establish a positive relationship with the participant and build trust between the researcher and participant. The content questions in Appendix B were presented in a friendly and non-confrontational manner. Participants were never coerced or pressured to answer questions. The researcher restated responses from the participants answering clarifying language to ensure the meaning of what the participant intended to communicate was captured. The goal of content questions 1-2 was to answer RQ1. Content interview questions 3-9 were used to answer RQ2. Throughout interview, I employed probing questions.

At the conclusion of each interview, I thanked interviewees for participating in the study. I confirmed that participants' identities would remain confidential. At any

time, interviewees could withdraw from the study, and their testimony would be removed from data files. During closing, I shared with each participant that a narrative summary of the conclusions would be shared with all participants at the study's conclusion. Once the interview was complete, I removed the participants identifying information from the interview notes and replaced their identity with an identification number to maintain confidential records.

Each in-person interview averaged approximately 30 minutes. After each interview, the researcher transcribed all the interviews onto a Microsoft Office table. I developed a frequency of response table using the raw data. Each participant's data was sorted by school district and by an administrator before being analyzed. The frequency of responses in the initial frequency table was analyzed through multiple levels of coding. The Microsoft Office table included columns labeled as line, speaker, raw data, notes, first cycle coding, and seconding cycle code.

The sample consisted of eight high school leaders, including principals, assistant principals from six high schools, and ELL supervisors from three school districts. Creswell and Creswell (2018) stated that with qualitative interviewing, samples can be as small as 3-10 participants and still produce meaningful results. Using eight interviews was an adequate sample size for this proposed qualitative research study because smaller sample sizes help researchers build closer relationships with the participants and produce more authentic data through natural conversations (Rubin & Rubin, 2021). Qualitative data is about the richness and detail collected to explore the experiences and perceptions of individuals who are embedded in the phenomenon (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022).

To gain access to the eight interview participants, I reached out to all the high school principals, assistant principals, and the district-level ELL supervisors in the three largest school districts in one northeastern state. These three school districts have the state's highest concentrations of ELLs (Gula, 2021). I gained access to the list of potential participants by sending out an electronic invitation identified in Appendix C. My intent for this study was to accept the first ten participants who reached out, agreeing to be part of this proposed study.

Role of the Researcher

I have worked closely with students and families of ELLs during my tenure as an educator. I recognize that not only do ELLs have challenges beyond language acquisition in developing the academic skills to be successful in high school, but also teachers lack the knowledge or strategies to support this population in the mainstream classroom. In the schools that I have worked in, school administrators often defer to the building ELL instructors to take the lead in providing professional development workshops and training in supporting ELL students, but leaders have not always assessed the individual teacher needs in being able to deliver sheltered instruction or other strategies to support this student population.

I want to acknowledge the unique ELL needs in my home state and the limited resources and guidance from the state and federal levels to support this growing population through my doctoral study. This study explores the importance of shared leadership in acknowledging both individual student and staff needs in creating effective programming and teaching strategies for all ELLs. The needs of ELLs extend beyond the

role of the ELL instructors to build the language and academic knowledge base for students to become career and college ready.

Having been a former ELL instructor, I understand my personal biases as an educator. To mitigate my own research bias, I developed a thorough research methodology and focused on the data collected from high school leaders in three distinct urban school districts. To do this, I structured my semi-structured interview questions around my two research questions and created an audit trail with recorded and written transcripts of all the interviews. I summarized and categorized the data with the original context of the participant's purpose, and I also provided copies of the transcripts to each participant in the study to check for accuracy and clarity of thoughts and opinions (Rubin & Rubin, 2021).

Data Analysis

This basic quality research study relied on thematic coding to analyze the data. According to Ravitch and Carl (2021), coding enables researchers to take large amounts of data, and categorize and connect data points across all the participants to identify themes or generalizations. One of the first steps in coding qualitative data is transcribing the collected information. Transcribing qualitative interviews provided the researcher with more familiarity with the data collected so the data could be more effectively sorted and organized.

Confidentiality

A password protects the transcribed computer files to maintain the confidentiality of each participant. Only the researcher has access to the transcripts and recordings.

Identifying information was removed from each transcript and replaced with identification codes. A legend for the identification codes was encrypted and kept in an online codebook separate from the raw data. After each interview, I removed identifying information from each participant's transcript before conducting the analysis and replaced each participant's name with a unique identification code. For this proposed basic qualitative study, the name of each participant was removed and replaced with an identification code using the first letter of the school district, followed by the initials of the participant's position (P= principal; AP= Assistant Principal; DO= District Office ELL Supervisor). I also included the first and last initial of the participant. I encrypted all computer files relating to the project study, and I kept all paper copies of draft project studies, outlines, and notes in a locked file cabinet. All data, including handwritten notes, was saved and filed to provide a qualitative research audit data trail.

Coding

This basic qualitative study identified common patterns and themes across all participants to identify the challenges and the resources needed to improve graduation rates for ELL students in one northeastern state. Coding is one way to analyze qualitative data (Saldaña, 2016). Coding can benefit the research process by allowing the researcher to organize large amounts of qualitative data from interview transcripts to identify patterns and themes that may lead to meaningful conclusions (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The qualitative interviewing of eight participants in a homogenous sample of school leaders provided sufficient data. Coding helps reduce bias, increases validity, and provides

transparency (Saldaña, 2016). In this qualitative study, multiple levels of coding were used.

I used Saldaña's process for thematic analysis by reviewing the data, providing initial codes based on keywords, categorizing repeating data points based on reoccurring topics and patterns, defining themes, and reporting data. The data went through multiple levels of coding as part of the analysis. Open coding, as it is sometimes referred to, focuses and labels data using simple words or phrases (Saldaña, 2016). Descriptive coding is commonly used to break down interview transcripts and allows the researcher to summarize large amounts of data into one word or short phrase. A second-level coding identified as categorical coding links the data together in the form of categories and subcategories. Categorical coding identifies patterns from reoccurring data points (Hahn, 2008). Coding helps qualitative researchers reflect, interpret and theorize based on the patterns from the data collected. The third level of coding is where the researcher induced themes from shared data across the transcript interviews that reveal the most significant categories and subcategories shared by multiple perspectives and supported by evidence from the interviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Qualitative research studies are limited to 5-7 themes. These identified themes were used as headings in the results section of this study.

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), establishing trustworthiness and credibility is an important step in the analysis process. Creswell and Creswell suggested using multiple validity procedures, including rich, detailed descriptions, clarifying any bias presenting both positive, and negative viewpoints, employing triangulation practices,

and member checking. To ensure the qualitative research approach was reliable, I checked all interview transcripts against the digital recordings for accuracy and ensure consistency and clear definitions of code meanings during the coding process.

Researcher reflexivity is the understanding and response to one's own research bias. To mitigate any bias, I followed the interview protocol, ensured the conclusions were grounded in the conceptual framework of transformational leadership and maintained an audit trail of all the data collection and analysis practices. I maintained a research journal to assist in self-reflection by recording my experiences, concerns, questions, or personal challenges throughout the research process (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). With member checking, the results of the qualitative study were returned to participants for validation (Rubin & Rubin, 2021).

Discrepancies in qualitative research are when one data point contradicts another (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In a naturalistic research setting, some participants may share information or experiences that are contrary to what is shared by other participants. Researchers can present information that goes against a general theme shared by multiple participants. Sharing an alternative viewpoint strengthens the validity and authenticity of the results (Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

Ethical Considerations

For this basic qualitative study, the researcher treated all participants per The Institutional Review Board standards and Walden University's dissertation guidelines. There were no identifiable risks for the participants in this study. There could have been a concern that some participants may feel uncomfortable answering questions if their

response implies gaps in their leadership strategies. All efforts were made for the participants to feel comfortable and trust in the research process. Participants were informed of their role in helping to create a body of data that will lead to a project study that can be shared with the state ELL advisory committee after the research study concluded. Participants were made aware that their participation in this study was voluntary, and they had the right to withdraw at any time.

Limitations

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), a small sample size of 8-12 participants using a homogeneous sample can be effective and a qualitative sample size that is too large leads to repetitive data. A potential limitation with conducting qualitative in-depth-individual interviews is that there is a risk of participants struggling to provide honest opinions or perceptions of the topic. As a former ELL department head teacher, I mitigated my researcher bias by remaining objective and reflexive in my role as a researcher. Additionally, I ensured the confidentiality of each participant and provided all participants with copies of their own interview transcription to check and made sure there was a mutual understanding behind the participants' recorded statements.

Data Analysis and Results

The data collected for this project study included the opinions and reflections of eight school leaders representing principals, assistant principals and district ELL supervisors from the three largest school districts in one northeastern state. Invitations were sent out electronically to thirty-five high school leaders who met the criteria to participate in this study. Eight participants responded by agreeing to participate in the

study. One additional school leader responded that he declined to participate. In total, three high school principals, three high school assistant principals and two central office ELL directors encompassed the collection of the research participants. The interviews were conducted in person and the researcher traveled throughout one northeastern state over the course of five weeks to conduct the interviews. In total four public high schools and two district offices were represented in the study. Table 1 displays the makeup of the eight participants who participated in the qualitative project study.

Table 1

Participation in Study by Leadership Role and School District

Identifier	Leadership Role	School District
P1	High School Principal	School District A
P2	High School Principal	School District A
P3	High School Principal	School District B
AP1	High School Assistant Principal	School District A
AP2	High School Assistant Principal	School District A
AP3	High School Assistant Principal	School District C
DO1	District Level ELL Supervisor	School District A

Results

The participants were interviewed individually using semi-structured interviews consisting of nine interview questions. Interview questions 1-2 were used to respond to research question one; What do school administrators perceive as the most significant challenges influencing high school ELLs' low graduation rates? Interview questions 3-9 answered research question two; What are the administrators' perceptions of the resources and support needed to help high school ELL students graduate? All the

interviews were recorded using an Olympus WS-852 Digital Voice recorder. The researcher manually transcribed each interview. Once the eight transcriptions were complete, the researcher manually coded each interview using open coding principles. In total, 436 open codes were generated from the eight individual interviews spanning over five hours of conversation between the researcher and the participants. During the second coding cycle, the open codes were regrouped into categories related to the two research questions that guided the study. Some codes were also eliminated because while they shared the opinions and ideas of the research participants, they were not relevant to answering either of the research questions. Once the second coding round was complete, the researcher identified themes that encompassed the ideas of the interview participants.

During the qualitative interviews, the researcher used interview questions 1-2 to answer research question one; What do school administrators perceive as the most significant challenges that influence low graduation rates for high school ELLs? and interviews questions 3-9 to address research question two; What are the administrators' perceptions of the resources and support needed to help high school ELL students graduate? From each research question, six themes were identified from the experiences and perceptions of the eight research participants. Table 2 categorizes the 12 themes by the research questions.

Table 2

Research Themes Categorized by Research Question

RQ1: What do school administrators perceive as the most significant challenges that influence low graduation rates for high school ELLs?	**RQ2: What are the administrator's perceptions of the resources and support needed to help high school ELL students graduate?**
• Administrator PD • Language Acquisition • ELL Case Management • Cultural Competence • Student Motivation • Parent Engagement	• Relationships • Culture and Climate • Community Engagement • Instructional Practices • Professional Development • Teacher Self-Efficacy

RQ1

Six themes were generated around Research Question One; What do school administrators perceive as the most significant challenges influencing high school ELLs' low graduation rates? Table 3 displays a frequency table of the themes identified by the research participants related to RQ1.

Table 3

Frequency Table Identifying Themes Generated by Participants Answering RQ1

Challenge Theme	**# Participants Who Identified Theme**	**Relative Frequency %**
Administrator PD	7	87.5%
Language Acquisition	7	87.5%
Case Management	6	75%
Cultural Competence	8	100%
Student Motivation	8	100%
Parent Engagement	8	100%

Professional Development for School Administrators

Professional development for school administrators involves the training and improved understanding provided to school leaders in the areas of second language acquisition, cultural awareness, language development, and instructional practices to help supervise and support teachers who work with ELLs in their classrooms. Seven out of eight participants in this study indicated that the lack of ELL professional development specific to administrators was a significant challenge for high school leaders in attempting to improve graduation rates for ELLs. An ELL supervisor identified as participant DO2 indicated that school leaders need confidence in recognizing effective ELL instruction. It is important for the ELL standards to be added to the certification preparation program for school principals in one northeastern state. Participant DO1 added that ELL is not a blanket need within the state, and most school districts do not have a high need for administrative training focused on this special population. Participant P2 and AP2 stated that administrators are forced to travel outside the state to acquire specialized instruction for administrators to support English learner instruction. Participant AP2 also added that administrators within the northeastern state only take a general course in understanding special populations, including students with IEPs, 504s, gifted and talented, and those who qualify as ELL. However, according to participant P3, more than general training is needed to support the high numbers of ELLs in the three larger communities within the state.

Language Acquisition

Language acquisition refers to the process and time it takes for an individual to learn basic communication skills and the cognitive academic language proficiency needed to become proficient in another language. All eight participants indicated that language acquisition was a significant challenge in helping to improve graduation rates for ELLs. Paraticipant P3 stated that the language barrier has the greatest influence on academic achievement. Several other school leaders, including P1, P2, AP1, AP2, AP3, DO1, and DO2, said that when ELL students arrive in the United States as teenagers, there is not enough time for them to acquire the academic content knowledge needed to pass core graduation requirements like Biology or Algebra. Participant AP3 added that even with the training the district has provided, teachers still struggle to make content accessible to beginner ELLs. Participant DO1 added that English is a difficult language to begin with; newcomer ELL students have a monumental task in acquiring the necessary language skills to navigate through high school coursework if they arrive during their teenage years. Language development teaching strategies and sheltered instruction are only helpful teaching strategies after a student has acquired some language skills. While both participants DO1 and DO2 identified a need for individual language plans for all ELL students, the challenge is that language is so fluid that the plans would constantly need adjustment, putting additional strains on teachers and school administrators.

Case Management

ELL case managers help coordinate the direct services for ELLs, monitor students' academic progress, and consult with mainstream teachers to ensure academic

accommodations are being implemented. Six of the eight research participants identified ELL case managers as being overworked and not having enough support. Participant P1 stated that the number of ELL students entering the school district is faster than the growth of ELL case managers and instructors needed to support this growing population. Participant P2 observed that ELL caseloads have increased from 60 students to over 100 in the last ten years. Participant P3 added that high caseloads do not effectively allow case managers to support students reclassified onto monitored status. It is important for ELL case managers to understand the academic content of multiple disciplines to support students. For example, an ELL teacher who co-teaches in an Algebra class to support ELLs, needs to understand the principles of teaching Algebra. Both participants DO1 and DO2 shared that the role of ELL case managers, including coaching teachers, assessing students, and parent outreach regularly, interfere with their primary responsibilities of providing direct instruction to their ELL students.

Cultural Competence

All eight research participants identified the diversity makeup within the three largest communities in one northeastern state to be a challenge in supporting graduation rates for ELLs. Participant DO1 stated that the ELL populations within these three large communities mirror the makeup of the rest of the country. Yet, services for ELLs are not a priority to most of the state. Participant AP2 mentioned that the concentration of ELLs is in only a handful of communities around the state and has added to the lack of quality teacher training. Participants P1, P2, and AP 1 all shared that with over sixty languages and cultures in one school district; school administrators and teachers struggle to meet

their students' culture and language demands. The expectation is for all educators to become more familiar with all the cultures in the classroom. Participants P1 and DO1 also shared that about 25% of their ELL students are long-term ELLs born in the state. Students are often stuck between cultures without a basic understanding of the language and culture of their home country. Participant AP1 also added that the ELLs are transient and constantly moving in and out of the school communities adding to the disruption to the students' education. Participant DO2 said that the lack of teacher diversity and the "white school culture" that still exists within many schools in the state add to the challenge of engaging multi-lingual students and families.

Student Motivation

Student motivation in this study refers to the student's willingness to work toward short and long-term goals connected with their learning. All eight research participants indicated low student motivation influences graduation rates among ELLs. Participants DO1, P2, and AP2 stated that many teenagers struggle with low motivation in school, but ELLs seem to be more vulnerable to struggle with academic motivation. Participant DO1 added that ELLs could become easily frustrated by not understanding the language and, therefore, giving up trying to access the learning content. Consequently, high frustration and anxiety can lead to low academic motivation. Participant P3 indicated that ELL students struggle to meet basic life needs in Maslow's pyramid, like secured housing and safety; therefore, many students don't recognize the importance of education right away. Participants AP2 and AP3 stated that student behavior, including low morale and self-efficacy in school, often results in students struggling physically, socially or emotionally.

Participant P1 added that motivation is needed for resiliency, and resiliency is necessary for learning. Participant DO2 added that students need their parents to support them in school to become resilient, which is also a challenge for school leaders, because when parents are absent from their children's learning, students often become separated from their native culture, which also decreases student motivation.

Parent Engagement

All eight research participants indicated that low parent engagement is a significant challenge for school leaders in supporting ELL graduation rates. Participants DO1 and AP2 acknowledged that parent engagement generally decreases as students age. However, ELL families often cannot engage with schools because they often lack transportation, have limited communication technology, and sometimes require more literacy skills to understand memos and flyers inviting them to participate in school events. Participant P2 questioned whether ELL parents fear school because they feel inept in understanding English and school culture. Participant AP3 stated that parents are not communicating with teachers. There is no diversity in the parent-teacher association; therefore, they are not participating as a decision-making stakeholder. Participant P3 revealed that even though his staff has conducted home visits to communicate with ELL families, these visits are time-consuming and require significant resources. Participant DO2 indicated that finding ways to get to the parents should be a key focus in schools. Parent relationships are lacking, causing a significant power imbalance in the home between the parent and child. Parents need to support their children in school, but when children hold the power to translate messages from the school, they often manipulate

their parents. Participant DO2 suggested that schools change how they communicate with parents and make better attempts to engage parents by teaching them about school and community culture. Students are struggling to assimilate into school culture because their parents also struggle to acculturate.

RQ2

Six themes were generated from the axial coding as factors in answering RQ2 (see Table 4).

Table 4

Frequency Table Identifying Themes Generated by Participants Answering RQ2

Needs Theme	**# Participants Who Identified Theme**	**Relative Frequency %**
Relationships	8	100%
Culture and Climate	8	100%
Community Engagement	8	100%
Instructional Strategies	8	100%
Professional Development	8	100%
Teacher Self-Efficacy	8	100%

Relationships

All eight research participants indicated that relationships are essential to improving graduation rates among ELLs. Participants P1 and P2 said that relationships are the key to student success. However, there needs to be a special emphasis on reaching ELL students and their families. Participant P3 shared that one way to build these relationships is to have a bigger visual presence in the building and go into ELL classrooms to share the importance with students of doing their best and performing well on state testing and the WIDA ACCESS language proficiency tests. Participant DO1

indicated teachers need to do a better job at building relations with students in the classroom. Participant AP1 added to this by stating that the case managers currently are the ones that have the best relationships with ELLs. If school leaders want students to perform better in mainstream classes, the expectation is for content teachers to engage ELLs even if they don't fully understand the language. Parent relationships also need to be a priority for parents and administrators. Participant AP3 indicated that relationships help improve student motivation, decrease attendance, and decrease behavior.

Participants AP2 and DO2 shared that their focus on this year's training development has been on relationships, including providing cultural awareness training for all staff. Participant AP2 said that teachers need to understand that student behavior is a way of communicating their lack of understanding and frustration in the acquisition process. Schools should focus on relationships between the teacher and child, the parent and teacher, and the parent and child. Participant DO2 emphasized that he meets with immigrant parents and lets them know that unless they move out of the school district, he will be there for their parents until they graduate or turn 22. According to DO2, those relationships become stronger when the school staff actively goes into the community and seeks out those relationships.

Culture and Climate

All eight participants shared 36 data points relating to school climate and culture. All research participants indicated a need to foster a positive learning culture that keeps the bar high for all students while acknowledging individual learning and cultural understanding for all learners. Both DO1 and DO2 indicated that there needs to be equal

access to the learning content and instruction for all learners without lowering the bar. According to DO2, lowering the bar provides a “false sense of hope.” Participant DO1 indicated that the two worst types of teachers an ELL student can have been a teacher who says, “I can’t teach you. Get out of my class!" or a teacher that feels sorry for the student’s situation and passes them when they have not earned the credit. Furthermore, teachers do not make cultural excuses for students when they don’t attend class or exhibit low motivation and poor behavior. Participant AP3 states that ELLs must be accountable for their learning.

While school leaders maintain the integrity of all learners to a high standard, all eight participants agreed that there also be equal access for all. Four respondents including, participants P2, AP 2, DO1, and DO2. indicated that sheltered content classes do not provide student learning access. The push-in model is much more effective regarding access to learning content. For push-in programs to work, Research participants AP2, P3, and DO2 believe schools should strive to foster a culturally responsive learning culture and incorporate a 360-degree view of each learner. Also, according to participant DO2, language immersion programs are successful when students are younger, like in upper elementary grades. Language immersion programs have profound positive effects on long-term ELLs when they reach high school. Research participant DO1 anticipates that his district will move to individual learning plans for all ELLs. The same respondent also indicated that, unlike nearby states with larger ELL populations, there are no bilingual education programs in the state, and with the current political landscape, that most likely would not be welcomed.

For a culturally responsive learning climate to work, several respondents indicated that it is important for there to be changes in how schools operate and are funded. Participant P2 currently uses grant funds to make the class size smaller, but for this to continue, it is important for school districts to add more money to the operating budget. Both DO2 and P3 stated it is important for the teacher's union to become part of the solution and allow flexibility in how teachers can best support students.

Community Engagement

All eight respondents acknowledged that stronger community engagement is necessary to help improve graduation rates for ELLs in their schools. Participant DO2 was the most vocal in stating that schools need to provide an external support system for students when parents cannot. According to participant DO2, these supports include providing ELL social workers who can go into the communities of ELL families and make sure students' needs are met so they can attend school regularly and focus on learning and building language skills. ELL parents often learn about their child's schools through the child's interpretation, and there needs to be better communication between immigrant families and the school. DO2 also indicated schools are responsible for teaching parents about the American school culture and how they can best support their child's learning.

Participant P2 indicated that schools should work towards bridging the gap between cultural differences. Both participants P1 and AP1 stated that more ELL outreach workers are desperately needed as currently, many outreach workers and ELL social workers are shared among multiple school buildings. Participant AP3 indicated

that the community needs to invest in more mental health services for ELLs and immigrant families, including bilingual therapists. Participant AP2 stated his school has turned to local liaisons within the immigrant communities, such as local pastors who know the families in their communities. The adult learning programs have also been very helpful in reaching out to the parents of ELLs and helping them understand how to support their child's education. Participants AP2 and DO1 acknowledged the need for someone to provide direction and structure to the community agencies and individuals who provide these supports through either volunteer work or as an axial function of their key positions in the community. P3 stated that his school had partnered with the non-profit foundation to create a learning ecosystem within the community. The partnership started three years ago but was delayed due to COVID.

Instructional Strategies

All research participant expressed the need for a more comprehensive collection of instructional strategies and resources to help support the academic and social-emotional needs of ELLs, improve instruction and assist educators in collecting and analyzing data on ELLs' academic performance and language growth. Participant P1 indicated that his school focuses on universal teaching strategies for all students. A competency-based learning model supports academic language development. School counselors ensure that students have the personal and educational resources to succeed. Other programs like Saturday School help provide individual support for student content classes. According to participants P2, P3, AP1, AP2, and DO1, digital software helps to identify skilled-based strategies for ELL students based on their WIDA Access scores.

Participant P2 said his school offers academic support for ELL students who struggle with educational content. The principal also indicated a need for more ELL paraeducators to push into academically demanding core classes like Algebra or Biology to help students access academic instruction. Participant P3 incorporates ELL study halls into the master schedule to give students time with their case manager to complete homework. Participant P3 has also purchased online programs to help make content more understandable by providing content articles for students based on their lexical reading scores.

According to Participant DO1, the school district is under an ELL settlement agreement and monitoring from the Department of Justice. The DOJ has been guiding this district in providing training and resources for all teachers and school staff. However, Participant DO1 believes the WIDA standards should align better with high school learning standards and grading competencies. According to Participant AP2, competency grading can help ELL students access academic content only if the feedback is timely and comprehensible to the student. Participant AP3 also identified her schools as using a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) and a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration as part of the learning culture to help ELLs. Participant DO2 indicated skill-based grouping as a need to get rid of academic leveling. Participant DO2's district just hired a Director of Equity and Inclusion to ensure all students have equitable access. The position is housed at the high school. When asked whether universal teaching is a good instructional strategy for all learners, seven of the eight respondents (86%) said yes. Participant DO1 was the only school leader to indicate that ELLs need more academic vocabulary support.

Teacher Professional Development

The research study generated 56 open codes from the eight respondents on the need for effective professional development opportunities for educators. All eight researcher participants agreed that more effective teacher and administrator professional development was needed to improve ELL graduation rates. Participant P1 discussed his role in sustaining the district professional development master plan. According to participant P1, teachers need to have a growth mindset to adapt their practices toward supporting language acquisition in their content classrooms. Participants P2, AP1, and AP3 reported that ELL instruction needs a bigger professional development component. Participant AP3 reported that more professional development should focus on instructional differentiation based on WIDA levels. Participants P2 and DO1 also indicated that hiring ELL coaches would help model effective language development strategies in the classroom for teachers.

According to Participant DO1, teachers should always think about language when creating a lesson plan. Participant DO1 also shared that hiring has become more difficult with an increase in teacher turnover and a national teacher shortage. Several years ago, a university provided an ELL certification cohort where teachers signed up to undergo a free ELL certification process. However, since becoming dual-certified, many teachers have left the district. Participant P3 hopes to one day partner with a nearby university to provide effective workshops for all teachers on understanding and supporting the learning needs of ELLs, because requiring all teachers to become ELL certified in a large school district is not feasible. Additionally, as more certified ELL teachers push into content

classrooms, there needs to be quality professional development focused on co-teaching. Participant DO1 added that co-teaching is not a natural skill for teachers.

Participants AP2 and DO2 indicated that teacher learning should focus on creating a culturally responsive learning culture. Culturally responsive teaching involves teaching around targeted needs, understanding cultural awareness, diversity, and microaggressions. School staff also need to participate in bias training. According to Participants AP2 and DO2, culturally responsive teaching needs to be a district goal. Participant DO2 indicated a strong need to change the teachers' thinking that language acquisition is not about intelligence but language. When asked whether the teacher evaluation rubric in their school included a standard specifically dedicated to ELL instruction. Participants AP2, DO2, and P3 indicated there was nothing specific in the teacher evaluation rubric around language development instructions. Participant DO1 said that his district did provide a specific ELL standard in the teacher evaluation rubric, but it was being replaced because ELL teachers did not believe it was effective.

Teacher Efficacy

From the data collection process, the data collection generated 103 qualitative open codes from all eight research participants on the topic of teacher efficacy. In this study, teacher self-efficacy refers to the confidence teachers have in supporting ELL learners' learning and language needs. All eight school leaders indicated that teacher experts, including ELL case managers and instructors, are best suited to train and model for other teachers. Participant P1 shared that developing a growth mindset in teachers and building confidence to make decisions and try out new approaches in the classroom is

good for ELLs. Participants P1, AP1, and AP2 indicated that head teachers and teacher leaders help foster strong communication throughout larger schools so that everyone's voice and ideas are considered. All three participants agreed that collaboration and shared decision-making strengthen the learning culture. Participants P2 and AP2 explained that encouraging more teachers to conduct peer observations or instruction rounds will help improve instruction and increase teacher efficacy.

Participants P2, P3, AP1, AP2, AP3, DO1, and DO2 indicated that the central office supports teachers in taking risks in the classroom and trying out new ideas to expand access to the content even if new strategies fail. However, participants P2 and DO2 admitted that they fear teachers don't believe in the concept of a "teacher being free to fail." While teachers need to show leaders, participant AP2 emphasized that it is essential for school leaders to be present and "at the table" to validate concerns and successes and help teachers work through the problem. School leaders need to ensure teachers have the support, encouragement, and resources to meet students' academic language needs. Participant P3 added that teaching with fidelity and integrity is paramount for all learners, especially for our more vulnerable populations like ELLs. Participant DO2 indicated that if teachers show the data or evidence of why they are making a certain decision in the classroom, they will not be at fault for trying something new.

Several research participants indicated the need for the state to reevaluate how school leaders measure student success regarding ELLs. Participant P1 explained that when ELL newcomers enter the United States as high schoolers, the goal should be to

build skills for productivity as an adult rather than focus on unattainable academic diplomas when there is limited time added to this point by stating educators need to look at multiple data points for student success that may not include a high school diploma. Participant P3 indicated that his school's fifth-year graduation rates show how extraordinarily successful his ELL students can be. Yet, the state evaluates principals and school districts based on four-year graduation rates. Participant DO2 stated that we often use the wrong type of data to measure success with our refugee and new American families because it usually takes multiple generations before families become successful in school and identify as college ready.

Discussion

Leadership Challenges

The challenges school leaders face in supporting high school graduation rates for ELLs in the three largest school communities in one northeastern state mirror similar challenges other school leaders experience across the country. Since 2010, there has been a 28% increase in ELLs enrolled in K-12 public schools nationwide. This increase equals about one million additional ELL students in the past five years. Forty-three states have experienced an increase in ELLs (The National Center for Educational Statistics, 2022, May). Yet funding at the federal level has stayed relatively flat even though the accountability for states has increased through the Every Student Succeeds Act (McInerney & Elledge, 2013). At the same time, public schools in the United States are facing a national teacher shortage. According to He and Bagwell (2022), teachers feel unequipped to address the diverse learning needs of ELL students. While some states like

California are seeing a decline in Latino immigrants, other states with historically low ELL numbers have significantly increased. The concentration of ELLs within one northeastern state lies within three states (Gula, 2021). As a result, teacher and administrator preparation programs within the state have not focused on supporting ELLs, as indicated by the participants in the study.

All the participants in the study indicated that language acquisition and the time it takes for students to acquire language proficiency is one of the biggest obstacles for ELLs to meet the academic requirements for graduation. The concerns reported by the research participants echo Krashen and Cummins' major theories of language acquisition. According to Cummins, cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) can take anywhere from 7-10 years (Cardoza & Brown, 2019; Krashen,1982). With the high school window only being four years, school leaders often need to improve in providing access to academic content. Even with individual instruction practices in place, language development usually takes more time to access academically demanding content. While studies show bilingual education programs can help students access academic content while developing their English language skills (Garza-Reyna, 2019), states with historically low diversity like the northeastern state in this study, legislation would not be available to support funding for bilingual education.

Parent engagement at the high school level is a challenge for English learning students and non-ELL peers. Yet engaging ELL families is quite more involved. Many immigrants and refugee families need help understanding the American school culture and how to help their children succeed. In addition, to the language barrier, parents lack

the resources, including transportation or available technology, to communicate with teachers via email, text, or phone. Parents may be intimidated from interacting with teachers or school leaders if they are uneducated or experienced trauma in their home countries. Many immigrant families resist mental health services for themselves or their families (Berkowitz et al., 2021; Mwangi et al., 2019). Within this northeastern state, ELL parents are not serving as stakeholders or decision-makers in their child's education. While many research participants in the study recognize the need for educators to go into the community and actively reach out to immigrant families and invite them to participate in their child's education, this approach requires significant resources and time (Cabus et al., 2020). According to the research participants, parent engagement fosters student resiliency which is necessary to persevere and break through these. Without bilingual social workers or more community stakeholders, parent engagement is a considerable barrier for ELLs.

Student motivation of ELLs is another challenge. This challenge is a significant barrier for ELLs at the high school level, but it is also built upon other challenges indicated in this study (Roman & Nunez, 2020). In addition to language acquisition, ELL students endure many sociocultural challenges that make learning difficult and impact learning motivation (Ouyang & Jiang, 2018). Newcomer ELLs struggle with isolation, embarrassment, and grief when they arrive in a new country. Language distance and status can make learning a second language difficult as well. students to meet their basic survival needs like food, shelter, safety, and security before focusing on their learning and career goals (Artamonova, 2020; Sun & Ng, 2021).

Leadership Needs and Resources

The needs and resources indicated by school leaders in the three largest school districts in one northeast state correspond to the challenges identified by research question two. For content teachers to meet the language and learning needs of a diverse group of ELLs, they need to have access to professional training focused on understanding language acquisition, social-cultural dynamics and sheltered instruction practices. Teachers also need the confidence and self-efficacy to collaborate and learn from one another to meet the learning needs of this vulnerable population. Teachers learn best from other teachers. Kibler and Castellón Palacios (2022) shared that ELLs benefit when content teachers and certified ELL teachers collaborate. Teacher collaboration, whether it's co-teaching, PLCS, peer observations, or coaching is used, is key for school leaders to infuse collaboration into the learning culture. Teacher collaboration takes work and effort, and the practice is not automatic (Erdel & Takkac, 2020).

It is important for administrators to model these instructional skills and cultural understanding of different students. According to Lech and Cohen (2021), school principals with certifications in English Language Learner Instruction are rare. Professional Development programs for principals focused specifically on this student population are limited; therefore, teacher and administrator prep programs should acknowledge a growing ELL population in the state by incorporating language acquisition theories, cultural awareness and language development strategies.

Relationship building among stakeholders is a key need in supporting all learners to succeed academically. Relationships not only need to be teacher-student but also

teacher-parent, parent-student and student-student based as well (Sela-Shayovitz & Finkelstein, 2020). Community outreach services such as ELL social workers, community liaisons and planning family centered events in these ELL targeted communities are great ways to build trust and cultural understanding with families (He & Bagwell, 2022). Another way to foster positive relationships in school is to foster a positive school climate. Culturally Responsive schools support a learning culture where all students' cultures and learning needs are acknowledged. All students are held to a high standard and the focus is to provide equal access to all students (Buffington & Bryant, 2019). School leaders also need to attract and hire educators who value diversity in their classroom and will strive to meet the learning and language needs of all ELLs while preserving the fidelity of competency-based grading and not lower the bar.

All three school districts in this qualitative study have invested in technology resources to help improve language proficiency among ELLs. Digital resources and data management resources help teachers target instructional needs in the classroom that were not used by all districts. According to Lee et al. (2022), many factors should be considered when determining technology's effectiveness in increasing language and academic proficiency. Some factors include a student's base language proficiency skills, comfort level with using technology, and the teacher's proficiency in instructing students to use the new technology. Digital resources are not an absolute solution to improving the academic language skills of high school ELLs.

The district and school goals represented by school leaders in this study are related to improving ELLs' academic achievement. Yet, each district differed in their

approach. While one district focused on providing instructional strategies for all teachers through professional in-service days, another school district focused on cultural awareness training and community outreach. The third district has been moving in the direction of incorporating more co-taught classrooms with both content and ELL certified teachers working together. Not only did these approaches differ among school districts but the use of resources differed as well. While two high schools relied on the expertise of ELL trained staff to provide professional development to all staff, another district had been bringing in experts in the field from nearby states.

In deciding which school district's approach is most beneficial to supporting ELLs' graduation rates, all three approaches are backed by research on culturally responsive learning communities. According to Hudson (2020), faculty wide diversity training including cultural awareness workshops and bias training help to foster a culturally responsive learning culture by breaking down stereotypes and supporting the individual learning needs of all students. Culturally responsive teaching practices acknowledges language and cultural barriers in the classroom and helps teachers provide equal access to the content for all children by building background, teaching academic language skills and integrating content through an individual's culture which also results in sustained student motivation (Foster et al., 2020).

Summary

Findings from this study were used to address the research problem that school leaders face significant challenges in terms of improving graduation rates for ELLs. Semi-structured interviews from eight school leaders generated six themes that school

leaders across three school communities identified as significant challenges to supporting the academic readiness of ELLs. Participant DO1 said, “ELL is not a blanket need in the state.” In school communities with increasing ELL populations, educators need to be more versed in terms of second language acquisition theory, cultural competence, and instructional strategies to support language development in the classroom. Limited school funding also leads to high case management loads and limited resources to provide adequate outreach to families and immigrant communities, impacting student motivation and parental collaboration.

Research participants identified six additional themes relating to resources and needs that would be used to address these challenges. In addition to access to professional development to provide more instructional strategies, cultural awareness, and understanding of language acquisition theory, participants also identified additional resources to help improve parental collaboration between schools and families of ELL students. I addressed the importance allowing teachers to help with problem-solving and decision-making without risk to cultivate cultures and climates where individual learning is the focus of all instruction.

This study involved using the four key principles of transformational leadership practices: intellectual stimulation, individual consideration, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence. Outcomes from this study reveal that school leaders in one northeastern state strive to individualize instruction and engage students and families in learning. School leaders also want to increase and embrace cultural competence and

empower teachers to share new ideas and solutions to strengthen overall outcomes for all learners.

Within this setting, school leaders' challenges in terms of supporting ELLs are common to other school communities with increasing populations of ELLs. It is important for local educator preparation programs to expand pedagogy for ELLs and include culturally responsive teaching practices, bias training, and language acquisition theory. It is essential for state legislators and educational policymakers to understand unique challenges school leaders face in terms of supporting this growing population and address needs and resources that would assist schools in closing this achievement gap.

Section 3: The Project

Section 3 includes a synopsis of the capstone project resulting from this qualitative research study. The project includes policy recommendations presented to the state ELL advisory committee to increase resources in school communities with large ELL populations and raise ELL graduation rates. The transformative leadership theory was used as the conceptual framework for this study. Section 3 includes the rationale and implications for this project as well as scholarly literature supporting this capstone project.

Findings of this project study indicate a need to inform educational stakeholders at the state level about challenges and responsibilities of school leaders in urban school districts in order to raise high school graduation rates for ELLs. Study results reveal the importance of increased teacher professional development, cultural understanding, and community outreach to increase academic success of ELLs in school districts with limited resources. Educational leaders at the state level will provide revised guidance and additional resources to local school leaders in order to employ effective practices and raise graduation rates for ELLs in the state.

Rationale

Data analysis from this study generated 12 themes relating to challenges school leaders face in terms of improving high school graduation rates for ELLs and their perceptions about needs and resources to help ELLs reach graduation. These 12 themes were administrator professional development, language acquisition, ELL case management, cultural competence, student motivation, parent engagement, relationships,

culture and climate, community engagement, instructional practices, professional development, and teacher self-efficacy. Key principles of transformational leadership include individual consideration, idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, and inspirational motivation. These principles involve meeting students', educators', and families' unique needs by engaging stakeholders in decision-making processes, fostering ongoing learning and improvement, and promoting continuous growth.

I chose to share my research results with the state ELL advisory committee via a PowerPoint presentation to advocate for policy reform. According to the NCES (2022), ELLs make up 2.9% of the population in one northeastern state. However, most ELLs are concentrated in the three largest communities in the state (Gula, 2021). Despite state reforms to close the achievement gap between ELL students and their non-ELL peers, school leaders still struggle to support educational needs of this growing population. ELLs are four times more likely to drop out of high school than their non-ELL peers. Findings in this qualitative study suggest that school leaders acknowledge specific challenges involving improving graduation rates for ELLs. These challenges (see Table 3) include lack of administrator PD, challenges with language acquisition, high ELL caseloads, insufficient cultural competence, lack of student motivation, and limited parent engagement.

Results of the study also include input from school leaders to address challenges (see Table 4) and involve relationship building, improved culture and climate, community engagement, instructional strategies, PD specifically involving English language learning and approaches to improve teacher self-efficacy. For local school

leaders to secure resources to address these challenges, the state must provide school districts with large ELL populations with more support to lower teacher and case management loads, provide increased access to ELL-specific PD for both preservice teachers and veteran educators, and support culturally responsive learning environments in public schools. This project study involved educating the state ELL advisory committee on challenges and needs school leaders face in terms of improving graduation rates for ELLs. The SELAC is able to work with state-level educators and policymakers in order to recommend legislation and provide school leaders in larger school communities with resources to help to close the graduation gap and improve graduation rates for this population.

Review of Literature

The purpose of this qualitative project study was to develop a three-part policy to increase support for student needs, increase opportunities for teachers and school leaders to acquire effective strategies to support ELLs, and foster culturally responsive learning environments in schools with high numbers of ELL students. I will share findings of this qualitative study with the state ELL advisory committee and recommend additional resources for school leaders in order to support ELL graduation rates in large school communities. This volunteer group reviews ELL programming and policies and makes recommendations for legislation and policy reforms. To search for relevant articles involving the 12 themes in my project study, I used EBSCO Host, SAGE Journals, and Thoreau. I reviewed articles published between 2019 and 2023 except for seminal research relating to ELL specialists in schools, relevant PD for teachers, and culturally

responsive schools. Keywords for my search were: *ELL case management, culturally responsive learning, ELL instructional strategies, ELL professional development, implicit bias training for teachers,* and *teacher efficacy teaching ELLs*.

ELL Case Management

ELL case managers coordinate direct services for ELLs, monitor their academic progress, and consult with mainstream teachers to implement academic accommodations (Mashlan & Cebalo, 2022). They are also responsible for monitoring the academic progress of ELLs who have been reclassified onto monitored status for four years before exiting the ELL program. As these students transition out of direct language development programs, they often need supervision, tutoring, and advocacy as their language proficiency grows. While ELL instructors perform multiple roles in the school, since 2019, 32 states have seen a shortage of instructors who are able to support this population (Hayden & Gratteau-Zinnel, 2019). With limited resources, ELL case managers often need help adequately supporting reclassified students (Johnson, 2019).

According to Yao Fu and Wang (2021), there needs to be more research involving teacher self-efficacy when working with ELLs. ELL students spend most of their school time in mainstream classes. Teachers need confidence to build relationships with ELLs and respond to their learning needs. One of the reasons why high school ELLs may withdraw from school before graduating is their need for more connection with adults and other students. ELL students often invest in learning when their ELL teachers and content teachers share the same goals and language development strategies. Giles and

Yazan (2020) also recommend more collaboration between ELL and content classroom teachers to promote equitable access for all students.

PD for Educators

The results of this research study indicate the need to support teacher and administrator development in delivering content to ELLs, supporting academic language, and understanding the cultural needs of all learners. According to He and Bagwell (2022), teachers feel unprepared to keep the language needs of ELLs in the classroom. Most recently, as schools navigate the COVID pandemic, teachers have been less willing to engage in new teacher development workshops because of the added responsibilities of teaching remotely or through a hybrid model (Sugarman, 2021).

Under federal legislation, all ELLs have a right to access quality education. Classroom teachers must use strategies to remove barriers and ensure students can comprehend and participate in meaningful instruction (Skinner & Library of Congress (CRS), 2019). States with significant ELL student populations, like California and New Mexico, have implemented bilingual instruction programs where students gain access to academic content in their native language (Garza-Reyna, 2019). Most states rely on English language development programs where students spend part of their day in a specialized language program to learn academic language skills. Sheltered instruction is where content teachers implement language scaffolding and academic vocabulary building so that ELLs can access the instruction in English (Desjardins, 2020).

To assist teachers with sheltered instruction, schools often subscribe to online programs which provide teachers with strategies and language goals and even literacy-

appropriate reading articles based on students' proficiency level and lexical scores (Lee et al., 2022). Technology resources serve as effective resources for teachers. However, Lee cautions educators that digital resources do not guarantee that ELLs can access the content due to many factors, including the student's digital literacy skills and the teacher's comfort level using technology in the classroom.

As the ELL population in one northeastern state increases, the need for further teacher and administrator training becomes more evident (The National Center for Educational Statistics, 2022). Teacher preparation programs must provide service teachers with more strategies to support ELLs (Yao Fu, & Jiaxi Wang, 2021). According to Lech and Cohen (2021), administrator prep programs that include specific ELL training are also limited.

As classrooms in the U.S. become diverse, there is a greater need for professional development and teacher certification programs to provide opportunities for educators to learn culturally responsive teaching practices (Polleck et al., 2022). As teachers acknowledge this "diversity gap," teachers struggle to ensure access to learning for all learners in the classroom. Educators who acknowledge the cultural and linguistic diversity of the classroom in their instruction, resources, and discussions hold higher expectations for all students in the classroom but simultaneously work to provide equal access for everyone. In one alternative high school in New York, teachers who embraced CRP professional development showed more support in engaging students in their classrooms.

Culturally Responsive Schools

According to He and Bagwell (2022), effective school leaders demonstrate cultural understanding of the students in their schools to address the learning gaps between ELLs and their non-ELL peers. Teachers struggle with their knowledge to support diverse cultures in the classroom (Sugarman, 2021). The results from this qualitative research study indicate the need for schools with increasing ELLs to adopt a culturally responsive learning approach. Culturally responsive practices acknowledge the cultural strengths and weaknesses of all individuals in the class and provide access for all students through private practices and ongoing student motivation (Foster et al., 2020). For a learning climate that supports all learners, it is important to provide diversity training to the entire school staff to eradicate teacher bias and break down stereotypes (Hudson, 2020).

Culturally responsive teaching practices have been successfully used to motivate and support the diverse group of learners in the classroom, including ELLs. The existing literature shows the positive impact of culturally responsive teaching to engage culturally and linguistically diverse learners. Civitillo et al. (2019) explored the impact of culturally responsive classrooms in multiple schools through a multi-case study approach exploring the reflection of four high school teachers in Germany. The studies revealed that teachers that use culturally responsive teaching practices tend to be more self-reflective and cautious about addressing the needs of all students in the classroom.

According to Kressler et al. (2020), schools that use culturally responsive teaching practices with their Responsive to Intervention (RTI) decision-making by

examining students' cultural needs, exploring their learning gaps, and ensuring that students have equal access to the curriculum. Kresser et al. said that CRP provides valuable data to student support teams to target interventions and resources to lift students and improve learning.

Project Description

As part of a qualitative research study in one northeastern state, eight school leaders from the largest school communities participated in qualitative interviewing to explore the challenges school leaders face in increasing high school graduation rates for ELLs. The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the perspectives of high school leaders from the three largest school districts in one northeastern state, about the challenges of increasing ELL graduation rates and the resources and training teachers need, despite strategies the state put in place to improve graduation rates. This study included data from interviews with secondary school leaders, including high school principals, assistant principals, and district-level ELL supervisors from the three largest school districts in one northeastern state.

The deliverable for this project study involves presenting the findings of this study to the state ELL advisory committee. A copy of a power point presentation to recommend a policy to improve support for ELLs is in Appendix A. The results from this project study show the need for a stronger emphasis on providing professional development for school leaders and teachers around understanding the academic, social, and cultural needs of ELLs and best practices needed to raise language and academic proficiency at the high school level.

The SELAC committee serves as a bridge between the state department of education and the legislative body within the state. With the support of the commissioner of education, the SELAC committee, comprised of educators, school leaders, immigration advocates, and social workers, makes policy recommendations to state legislators to secure funding and implement best practices to improve student learning for ELLs. The SELAC uses data and evidence to recommend to the state education department where to allocate Title III funding and help set state policies and best practices to support ELLs. Members of the SELAC committee often reach out to state legislators who support public education to create legislation to bring to the state court also known as the state congress. For this project study, I have developed a PowerPoint presentation of the research project that will be shared with the SELAC committee.

State level officials assigned to support ELLs are limited. One position within the state department of education is identified as the Title III consultant. The Title III consultant oversees the Federal Title III funding throughout the state, annual language proficiency testing, and diversity and inclusion accountability in public schools statewide. The Title III coordinator facilitates the state ELL advisory committee meetings monthly through a remote platform. This individual communicates with school leaders throughout the state about supporting the needs of ELLs.

One primary barrier needs to be addressed for this policy recommendation to be successfully implemented within the one northeastern state is that support for ELLs is not a blanket need in the state. As previously mentioned, only 2.9 percent of the student population in the state are ELLs (NCES, 2022). Furthermore, most ELLs are

concentrated in the three largest communities in the state. Outside these three school communities, there is little ethnic diversity among students and families (Gula, 2021); therefore, state legislatures may not recognize the need for state-wide legislation to support a student population not represented throughout the state.

The estimated time for this proposed policy recommendation to be enacted will be approximately one calendar year. After a recommendation is made to the SELAC committee, the committee must agree that it wants to move forward and find a state legislator to support and draft the policy. In many ways the SELAC acts as a lobbying agent seeking policy change. The pending bill must then be brought to the house's speaker of the state's general court for a first public hearing and then assigned to a committee. I anticipate the recommendation for this bill would be assigned to the education committee. The bill would be deliberated and revised in committee before being returned to the general court to be voted on by the state house of representatives followed by a senate vote. If the bill is approved, the governor has five days to sign or veto the bill. Once the bill becomes law, the state education budget will need to be adjusted to provide the anticipated funds to support local school districts on their new initiatives.

While many school leaders use strategies to support an individual teacher's instructional needs in their classroom, this study's results show that the state department of education needs to be aware of the importance of embedding a culturally responsive learning culture into public schools to support learning. The results of this research study recommended that the state department of education support schools with increasing ELL

populations by providing resources to implement culturally responsive learning practices in all schools with growing ELL populations. The policy to be presented to the SELAC has three parts. This policy recommendation addresses the low graduation rates among ELLs in the state and relates to the current research literature.

Policy Recommendation Part A

The state will decrease ELL case management size by adding ELL specialists in school districts with increasing ELL populations. State education leaders should focus state and federal Title III funding on decreasing ELL case management loads to allow ELL specialists to support both active ELLs and those reclassified onto monitor status. ELL case managers serve as instructional leaders in the school. They ensure ELLs have access to instructional learning by removing language barriers, training teachers to shelter instruction, and helping foster a culturally sensitive school climate where all students are welcome and supported.

Policy Recommendation Part B

The state will increase partnerships with local universities and multicultural agencies to provide more professional development related to ELL instructional strategies, diversity training, and second language acquisition theory to educator and administrator certification programs. School administrators benefit from regularly having access to current research-based learning opportunities to model and support the growing diversity in schools within one northeastern state.

Policy Recommendation Part C

The state will support school districts with increasing ELL populations by helping school leaders implement a culturally responsive learning culture. Culturally responsive learning environments require all educators and staff to go through extensive training in cultural awareness, bias training, understanding of microaggressions, and instructional strategies in incorporating elements of all cultures into classroom learning.

Project Evaluation

Upon completing this research project, I created an informational PowerPoint on the results of my basic qualitative study exploring how school leaders can increase the graduation rates of ELLs within one northeastern state. This research project aims to advocate for social change that will ultimately provide greater support to schools with large ELL populations to close the achievement gap between ELLs and their non-ELL peers. The long-term effects of this research project will be evidenced by changes in educational policy, access to additional professional development opportunities, new collaborative partnerships between the school and community resources, and improved learning cultures in urban high schools.

A presentation to the SELAC committee through a PowerPoint was the best model for sharing the results of my findings. The SELAC is responsible for making recommendations for educational policy and resource allocation. This PowerPoint presentation included insights for school leaders at the state level who oversee policy and resources throughout the state.

Justification

The goal of this policy recommendation is the for the state department of education and state legislators to take action to promote better access to learning for ELLs. This recommendation is justified because school leaders working with large ELL populations in their districts have identified specific needs and resources to address the challenges of low graduation rates for ELLs. By increasing or reallocating state resources to target school communities with larger ELL populations, states can target effective professional development training for educators and administrators to address the individual needs of under-resourced learners, including ELLs. The policy recommendation will also support creating culturally responsive school climates in school communities with higher diversity rates and provide resources for community outreach to immigrant and non-English speaking families who traditionally lack access to collaborate with the school.

Outcome Measures

A successful policy recommendation will create a policy to support school leaders in helping graduation rates for ELLs in school communities with high ELL needs. The outcomes of this policy implementation will be measured by the following:

- The four-year high school graduation rates for English languages will increase.
- The drop rate for ELLs will decrease.
- Education programs for pre-service teachers will develop and implement cultural awareness segments, implicit bias training, and instructional pedagogies practices focusing on ELLs.

- The state will train school leaders in the three largest school communities to implement culturally responsive learning cultures in their schools.

Key Stakeholders

Key stakeholders for this policy change will include educators and advocates of education at both the state and local levels. The state-level stakeholders will consist of, the state ELL advisory committee, the education commissioner, the Title III state coordinator.

At the local school level, stakeholders will include the local board of education, school superintendents, ELL supervisors, principals, assistant principals, ELL case managers, high school teachers, English learning students, and families of ELLs as well as local colleges and universities in the state that provide existing teaching programs.

Project Implications

There are multiple opportunities for positive social change from this capstone presentation and policy recommendations to the SELAC. The SELAC comprises educators and other stakeholders from around the state. They use data and evidence to make recommendations to the state education department regarding where to allocate funding and help set state policies and best practices to support ELLs. The anticipated results from this project study show the need for a stronger emphasis on providing professional development for school leaders and teachers around understanding the academic, social, and cultural needs of ELLs and best practices needed to raise language and academic proficiency at the high school level.

Education policy makers can significantly influence what supports and resources are available to school leaders in supporting graduation rates for ELLs. This qualitative research project has identified a policy recommendation for the SELAC advisory committee to address supporting academic readiness for ELLs in the state by reducing ELL case management loads, and providing access to more professional development opportunities focused on the needs of ELLs. The study's results also show importance of school leaders understanding the importance of embedding a culturally responsive learning culture into the school to support all learners. Decreasing ELL case management loads, strengthening PD for teachers and fostering culturally responsive learning cultures in diverse schools will help to reduce many of the challenges schools leaders around the state face in improving the learning outcomes for high school ELLs including: building relationships, increasing parent engagement, enhancing student motivation and target instructional strategies that support language development in the classrooms.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Project Strengths and Limitations

As the number of ELLs entering U.S. schools continues to increase, researchers need to identify gaps in practice and find effective learning models to help high school leaders support graduation rates of this population. This basic qualitative study involved exploring multiple school communities within one northeastern state that have seen recent growth in ELLs. This study used transformational leadership theory as its conceptual framework which included the following key principles: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration.

This study's biggest limitation was accessing school leaders outside my district. When I sent out invitations to 35 high school leaders across the three largest school districts in one northeastern state, most volunteers came from the same school district where I worked. During subsequent rounds of administrator contacts, I reached out to additional school leaders in the other two communities. While the study included insights from the three largest school districts in this state, only four out of six high schools were represented, leaving a gap in data involving school leaders from two of the six largest high schools in the state.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

For my project study, I collected data via semi-structured interviews with school leaders working in the three largest school districts in one northeastern state. While participants shared challenges, in terms of increasing ELL graduation rates and identifying the needs and resources to address the gap in practice, one of the limitations

of the study was the lack of access to more principals, assistant principals, and ELL supervisors to participate in this study. Additionally, this study did not include ideas and opinions of other school leaders, including ELL case managers, head teachers, and policymakers from the state education department. An alternative approach to this study would be for me to expand the definition of school leader and increase the sample size by adding qualitative surveys or questionnaires to collect data from a larger pool of school leaders.

Scholarship, Project Development, and Evaluation

As a scholar, my capstone journey has supported my growth as a researcher and project developer. This qualitative project study has helped me integrate scholarly research with hands-on learning. My critical thinking and analytic skills have improved through qualitative research, which will allow me to better identify evidence in order to create solutions to existing problems in public education. Through qualitative interviewing, I have learned more about school leader challenges when supporting under-resourced learners, including ELLs. My study also allowed me to network with school leaders nationwide.

By developing this project for the study, I have begun to broaden my scope as a change agent. Looking at policy changes and education reform at the state level has led to me becoming an advocate for social change. School leaders must have support and guidance from state education departments to effectively support under-resourced student populations.

I am grateful for the opportunity to have been able to learn from eight unique school leaders from around the state with a common goal, which was to improve access to education for all learners.

Finally, this project study has given me insights regarding benefits of transformational leadership to support under-resourced learners. Transformational leadership is a collaborative approach that involves all stakeholders and supports learning for all students. This leadership approach creates common goals for school leaders and other educators, stimulating collaboration and sharing ideas. As I strive to move into new leadership positions, I will always use the four key principles of transformational leadership, which are idealized influence, individual consideration, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation.

Before engaging in this qualitative project study, I had a limited understanding of school leadership based on my teaching experiences in one school district. Through my doctoral study, I had the opportunity to explore three different school districts and their leadership approaches. During qualitative interviews, I was fascinated by different strategies school leaders took in terms of focusing their limited resources on prioritizing staff PD, teacher collaboration, opportunities for distributive leadership opportunities, and partnering with community agencies to engage families. Recommending policies to foster culturally responsive learning cultures in schools was not an anticipated outcome of my study. Nevertheless, each of the four high schools represented in the study has already been using key elements of culturally responsive teaching within their school

cultures to support ELLs. I recommend implementing culturally responsive learning practices in order to positively affect student learning.

Reflection on the Importance of the Work

The SELAC reviews and recommends legislation to the state to improve learning opportunities for all ELLs. This qualitative research project study involved providing the SELAC with insights from school leaders about challenges of working in school communities with large ELL populations.

This work generated from this project study is timely, as states with historically low rates of ELLs are experiencing increases. According to the NCES (2022), 43 states have seen increases in ELLs since 2013. It is important for education policymakers at the state level to ensure local school leaders have resources available to transform their school cultures into culturally responsive learning communities to ensure all students can access quality education.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

Results from this qualitative study include a policy recommendation to the SELAC to address ELL learning needs. The state education department is responsible for ensuring school leaders have sufficient resources for supporting student learning. It is important that school districts also ensure that teachers have the understanding, pedagogical tools, and confidence to adapt their instruction to support all learners, including those with limited language proficiency.

One unanticipated outcome of this study is implementing a culturally responsive learning culture. Culturally responsive learning communities support ELLs by ensuring

that cultural and language needs are part of content instruction. Culturally responsive classrooms recognize the diverse strengths of each child and teacher, validating cultural differences, and recognizing language and cultural needs outside of the classroom that are necessary to be successful learners. Future research should focus on exploring how school leaders can foster school-wide and culturally responsive learning cultures in schools and states with historically low diversity rates.

Conclusion

When I started the basic qualitative project study, I understood that the concept of effective universal teaching practices was good for ELLs. I have learned from this study ELLs need more than simply good teaching practices. They require more focus on academic vocabulary development, cultural understanding of the American school system, and positive relationships between families and schools which extend beyond language translation. To achieve these goals, school leaders can ensure teachers have the proper resources, guidance, and coaching available to foster culturally responsive learning environments. To meet needs of their ELLs, teachers need a balance between structured PD and the freedom and encouragement to try new approaches to instructing ELLs and removing language barriers that prevent equal access. Equally as important as teacher PD, administrator PD involving second language acquisition needs, cultural awareness and implicit bias is vital. The primary reason for the lack of ELL training in the state is because ELL instruction is not a blanket need in the state. While surrounding states have begun efforts to ensure all teachers become ELL-certified, the northeastern state in this study acknowledged ELL certification to be a need for all teachers. Findings

of this study show school leaders want to establish new partnerships with local universities, refugee settlement agencies, and agencies that focus on cultural awareness, bias training, and parent engagement.

Unfortunately, the importance of parent-school connections with families of ELLs have not been a priority in this northeastern state. It is critical school leaders change how they communicate and reach out to parents, which includes going into immigrant and refugee communities in order to create positive relationships with parents and ensure that community resources, including bilingual therapy and other mental health services, are accessible.

Improving student learning for ELLs is more than simple drills and skills. Teachers need skills, direction, and encouragement to focus on individual learning needs. It is important that school leaders view each student's strengths and contributions and look at the learning needs from several different viewpoints. Parent and community outreach is paramount for ELLs to develop resiliency needed for second language acquisition while simultaneously accessing academic learning. This basic qualitative research study involved recommending changes to educational policies by advocating for increased resources, including more ELL case management support, in-state PD opportunities for teachers and administrators, and increased community resources in urban school districts to support immigrant and refugee families.

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Appendix A: The Project

Exploring School Leadership to Improve Graduation Rates for High School ELL Students in a Northeastern State

Scott M. Jaquith

May, 2023

Doctor of Education; Educational Administration and Leadership

Policy Recommendation to SELAC Committee in One Northeastern State.

Background

- English Language Learners are the fastest growing student population in the United States. (Soland & Sandilos, 2021)
- According to Sanchez (2017) the overall graduation rate for English language learners in New Hampshire was 75% compared to 88.1% of all non-ELL students during the 2013-14 school year.
- In 2019 the overall graduation rate for English Language Learners in one Northeast state was 59.98% compared to 87.9% The New Hampshire Department of Education, 2019)
- In one Northeastern state ELL students are four times more likely to drop out of high school than their non-ELL peers.
- The State ELL Title III consultant, W. Perron (personal communication, April 26, 2021), states English language learners, including long term English learners, and students reclassified onto monitored status, continue to struggle to become college and career ready which impacts high school graduate rates.

Objective: In response to ESSA's guidelines, one northeastern state has developed a three-strategy approach to improve the academic outcomes for all English language learners in the state (US Department of Education, n.d.).

- Provide personalized learning for all students.
- Establish a metric for establishing growth and language proficiency for ELL students.
- Enhancing Outreach and Community Support

Problem Statement

- In 2015 Under The Every Student Succeeds Act all states are required to come up with a plan to address vulnerable populations which includes English Language Learners (Callahan et al., 2022).

Problem Statement (Continued)

The problem is that despite employing strategies put in place by school administrators in three urban high school districts in one northeastern state to support English language learners, graduation rates for this population have not improved. According to the state's department of Education, English language learners are at a greater risk of dropping out and not finishing high school unless schools provide effective supports to meet their language and academic needs.

Problem (Continued)

The three largest school districts in one northeastern state.

School District C	School District M	School District N
2018 59.4%	2018 70.9%	2018 58.45%
2020 70%	2020 67%	2020 55.25%

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Purpose of the Study

- The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the perspectives of high school principals, assistant principals, and district-level ELL supervisors from three school districts in one northeastern state, about the challenges of increasing ELL graduation rates and the resources and training teachers need, despite strategies put in place to improve graduation rates, including increased professional development for teachers, improved assessment strategies, and community outreach services to families put in place by school administrators to improve graduation rates for ELL high school students.
- **Significance**
  - Informing Challenges
  - Identify Resources/ Needs

7

Research Questions

RQ1: What do school administrators perceive as the most significant challenges that influence low graduation rates for high school ELLs?

RQ2: What are the administrator's perceptions of the resources and support needed to help high school ELL students graduate?

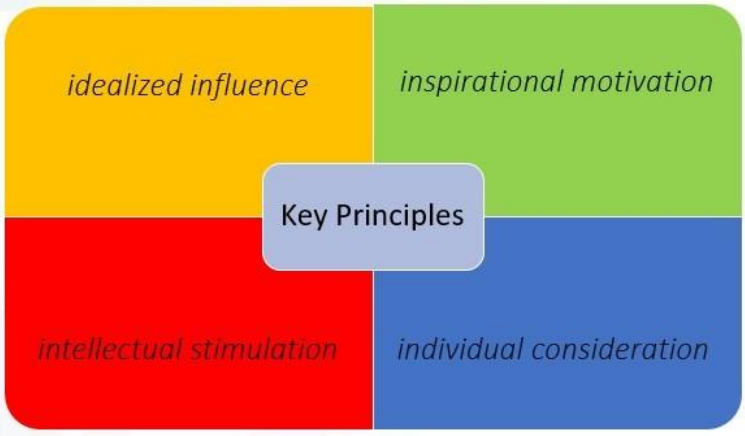
8

Conceptual Framework: Transformational Leadership Theory

- The conceptual framework of this project study is based on Transformational Leadership Theory.
- Transformational leadership focuses on shared decision-making practices within the education system and empowering teachers to lead, share, and teach others.
- Transformational school leaders empower teachers and students to solve challenges and voice their individual needs to achieve creative collective goals (Liou & Bornstein, 2018)
- Jim Burns served as a lead contributor to Transformational Leadership which was first identified as Moral Leadership theory (Burns, 1978).

9

Transformational Leadership Theory: Key Principles



(Shields & Hesbol, 2020).

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Method/Design

- The proposed project study will use a qualitative methodology
- Using this method will allow me to obtain rich descriptive data from expert school leaders working at the high school level in multiple schools and school districts (Merriam, 2009)
- **Research Design**
  - In-depth interviewing using a set of nine semi-structured interviews.
  - Interview Questions 1-2 (Research question One)
  - Interview Questions 3-9 (Research Question Two)
  - In-depth interviewing will allow me to collect data in a relatively short amount of time across multiple schools and school districts (Creswell, 2013).

11

Stakeholder Communication

The results of the study will be shared with all participant volunteers as a part of member checking

Participation is voluntary

Participation is confidential (school district, school, individual participant0

State ELL Advisory Committee (SELAC)

Consent form and partner agreement will be signed at the interview.

12

Participants/Sample Size

13

Participation in Qualitative Study by Leadership Role and School District

Identifier	Leadership Role	School District	Gender
P1	Principal	School District A	Male
P2	Principal	School District A	Male
P3	Principal	School District B	Male
AP1	Assistant Principal	School District A	Female
AP2	Assistant Principal	School District A	Female
AP2	Assistant Principal	School District C	Male
DO1	Director of ELL	School District A	Male
DO2	Asst. Superintendent/ELL Director	School District C	Male

Results

RQ1: *What do school administrators perceive as the most significant challenges that influence low graduation rates for high school ELLs?*

RQ2: *What are the administrator's perceptions of the resources and support needed to help high school ELL students graduate?*

15

Results for RQ1: *What do school administrators perceive as the most significant challenges that influence low graduation rates for high school ELLs?*

Challenge Theme	# Participants Who Identified Theme	Relative Frequency %
Administrator PD	7	87.5%
Language Acquisition	7	87.5%
Case Management	6	75%
Cultural Competence	8	100%
Student Motivation	8	100%
Parent Engagement	8	100%

Results for RQ2: *What are the administrator's perceptions of the resources and support needed to help high school ELL students graduate?*

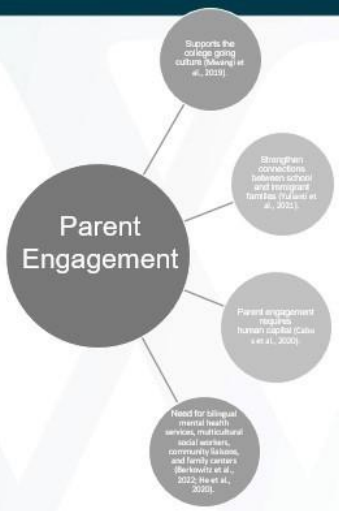
Frequency Table Identifying Themes Generated by Research Participants in Answering RQ2

NEEDS THEME	# PARTICIPANTS WHO IDENTIFIED THEME	RELATIVE FREQUENCY %
Relationships	8	100%
Culture and Climate	8	100%
Community Engagement	8	100%
Instructional Strategies	8	100%
Professional Development	8	100%
Teacher Self-Efficacy	8	100%

Connections to Research: ELL Case Management

- Provide direct services
- Monitor academic progress
- Teacher consultation
- Reclassified Students

Connections to Research: Parent Engagment



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Connections to Research: Professional Development

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Connections to Research: Culturally Responsive Learning

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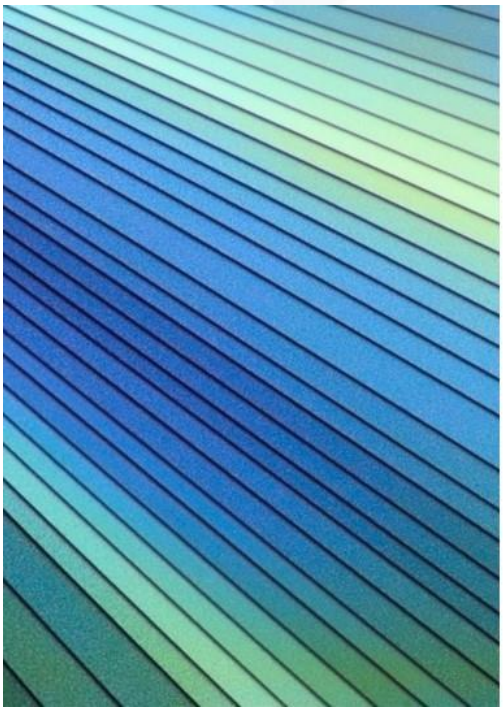

Project: Policy Recommendation

Produce a policy recommendation to implement culturally responsive learning cultures in urban schools.

Transform paper into a PowerPoint presentation.

Present finding to SELAC at a monthly Zoom meeting using the PowerPoint as a guide.

Existing Examples

- Civitilo et al. has explored the impact of Culturally responsive classrooms in multiple schools (2019) through a multi-case study approach exploring the reflection of four high school teachers in Germany. The studies revealed that teachers that use culturally responsive teaching practices tend to be more self-reflective and cautious about addressing the needs of all students in the classroom.

Existing Examples (cont)

- According to Kresser et al. (2020), schools that use CRP practices in their Responsive to Intervention (RTI) decision-making process improve learning for culturally and linguistically diverse learners by examining students' cultural needs, exploring their learning gaps and ensuring that students have equal access to the curriculum. Kresser suggests that CRP provides valuable data to student support teams to target interventions and resources to lift students and improve learning.

Limitations of the Study

28

- Only four of the six high school in the three largest school districts were represented in the study.
- Only 8 out of 35 school leaders were interviewed in the school study.
- Most of the interviewees came from the same school district as the researcher.
- ELL case managers, state policy developers were not interviewed or engaged during the study.

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Social Change Implications

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Reduce ELL Case Management Size.
- Provide more support for active ELL students receiving direct instruction.
- Improve supports for monitoring status

Strengthen parent engagement
- Increase resources for outreach and going into the community to support families.
- Provide bilingual therapy.

Foster Culturally Responsive Learning Communities.
- Cultural Awareness Training for teachers/admin.
- Increase opportunities for teacher/community collaboration.

- Improved Student Engagement
- Increased Student Achievement
- Increased Graduation Rates

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Stakeholder Communication: SELAC Committee

30

The State ELL Advisory Committee (SELAC) comprises educators and other stakeholders from around the state. They use data and evidence to make recommendations to the state education department regarding where to allocate Title III funding and help set state policies and best practices to support English learners.

For this Project Study, this research intends to:

- Write a policy recommendation to provide resources to foster culturally responsive learning climates in schools with increasing ELL populations in one northeastern state.
- Present to the SEALAC Committee through a PowerPoint explaining the findings.

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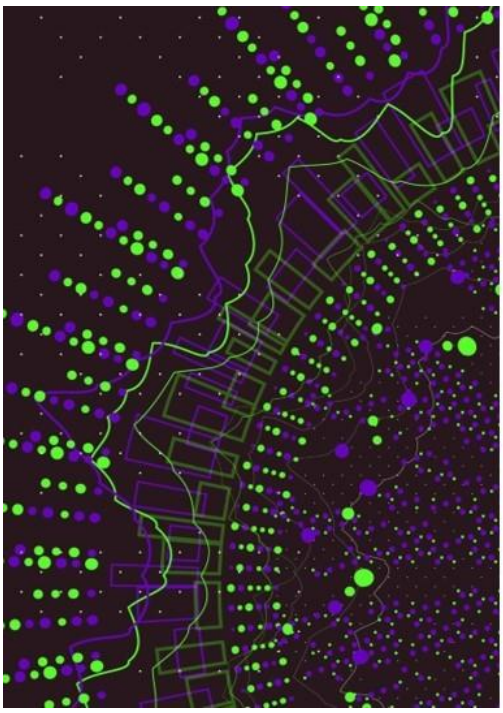
Recommendations for Future Research

- Explore Opportunities for Administrator/Teacher PD that focus on cultural awareness/bias training and language development strategies
- Explore Culturally Responsive Learning Culture in schools with increasing ELL populations.
- Idenitfy strategies for School to improve Parent Engagement and Community Partnerships including how to provide additional mental health services including bilingual therapy for students and families.

31



Conclusion

- The primary reason for this gap is that ELL instruction is not a blanket need in the state. While surrounding states have begun efforts to ensure all teachers become ELL certified, the northeastern state targeted in this study needs to start this process by fostering new partnerships with local universities, refugee settlement agencies, and agencies that focus on cultural awareness, bias training, and parent engagement and

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Appendix B: Interview Questions

The following nine questions will serve as the primary semi-structured interview questions for each participant in this basic qualitative research study.

1. What have you as a school leader experienced as the most significant challenge that schools face in improving academic skill development and graduation rates for English language learners? (RQ1)
2. How do the learning needs of English language learners differ from non-English language learners at the high school level? (RQ1)
3. What approaches have you taken to ensure that teachers meet the individual language and learning needs of English language learners in the school? (RQ2)
4. How does your leadership hierarchy ensure all teachers have the understandings, resources, and encouragement to adjust their instruction to ensure sheltered instruction and language development strategies are used in content classes? (RQ2)
5. How does building individual relationships with teachers, faculty, students, and parents influence the learning needs of English language learners in your school or district? (RQ2)
6. How do you foster this culture within a large high school that holds high expectations for all learners and acknowledges the individual learning and language needs of English language learners who often have different needs and challenges than non-English language learners? (RQ2)

7. How does your leadership approach influence a positive learning environment that supports the needs of under-resourced learners, including multi-lingual and English language learners? (RQ2)
8. How can school leaders increase self-efficacy and confidence in mainstream teachers to be more willing to adapt their instruction to meet students' learning and language needs in their classrooms? (RQ2)
9. How have you incorporated all the stakeholders involved in the decision-making processes to improve the academic and college, and career readiness outcomes for English language learners? (RQ2)

Appendix C: Email Invitation to Participation in Study

Subject line:

Interviewing high school leaders on ELL graduation rates in the Fall ($50 thank you gift)

Email message:

As part of my qualitative doctoral capstone project study, I am researching the challenges high school leaders face in improving the graduation rates of English language learners in our state. After this project study, I will present to the State ELL Advisory Committee (SELAC) and share my results and recommendations. My primary method of collecting data for this study will be through interviewing high school leaders, including principals, assistant principals, and district-wide ELL supervisors in the three largest school communities within the state. I invite you to participate in a qualitative research study through an in-depth individual interview this fall.

About the study:

- One sixty-minute in person or zoom interview that will be audio recorded
- One twenty-minute follow-up phone call after the interview has been transcribed.
- You would receive a $50 Barnes and Noble Gift Card as a thank you.
- To protect your privacy, the published study would protect your confidentiality.

Volunteers must meet these requirements:

- Serve as a school principal or assistant principal or ELL supervisor who works with ELLs.
- Work in one of the three largest school districts in one northeastern state.

This interview is part of the doctoral study for Scott Jaquith, a Ed.D. student at Walden University. Interviews will take place during Fall of 2022. Please respond to this email to let the researcher know of your interest.

Respectfully

Scott M. Jaquith

Walden University Doctoral Student

Appendix D: Consent

You are invited to take part in a research study about how high school leaders respond to the challenges of ELLs to improve graduation rates. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study seeks eight to ten volunteers who are:

- High school leaders including principals or assistant principals, or ELL supervisors.
- Employers working in one of the three largest school districts within one northeastern state.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Scott M. Jaquith, who is a doctoral student at Walden University. You may already know the researcher as an educator in the state, but this study is sperate from that role.

Study Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of high school principals, assistant principals, and district-level ELL supervisors from three school districts about the challenges of increasing ELL graduation rates and the resources and training teachers need. This proposed study will include input from secondary school leaders, including high school principals, assistant principals, and district-level ELL supervisors from the three largest school districts in one northeastern state.

Procedures:

This study will involve you completing the following steps:

- Take part in a one hour confidential, audio-recorded interview (zoom option is available) (one hour)
- Speak with the interviewer one more time after the interview to hear the researcher's interpretations and share your feedback (this is called member checking and it takes 20-30 minutes, phone option available)

Here are some sample questions:

10. What have you as a school leader experienced as the most significant challenge that schools face in improving academic skill development and graduation rates for English language learners?
11. What approaches have you taken to ensure that teachers meet the individual language and learning needs of ELLs in the school?
12. How do you foster this culture within a large high school that holds high expectations for all learners and acknowledges the individual learning and language needs of ELLs who often have different needs and challenges than non-ELL students?
13. How does your leadership approach influence a positive learning environment that supports the needs of under-resourced learners, including multi-lingual and ELLs?

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Research should only be done with those who freely volunteer, so everyone involved will respect your decision to join or not. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time. **Please note that not all volunteers will be contacted to take part.**" Or, "**The researcher will follow up with all volunteers to let them know whether or not they were selected for the study.**"

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Being in this study could involve some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life such as sharing sensitive information. With the protections in place, this study would pose minimal risk to your wellbeing.

This study offers no direct benefits to individual volunteers. The aim of this study is to benefit society by improving graduation rates for ELL high school students. Once the analysis is complete, the researcher will share the overall results by emailing you a summary of results.

Payment:

The researcher will email a $50 gift certificate for Barnes and Noble bookstore to all volunteers participating in the study.

Privacy:

The researcher is required to protect your privacy. Your identity will be kept confidential, within the limits of the law. The researcher is only allowed to share your identity or contact information as needed with Walden University supervisors (who are also required to protect your privacy) or with authorities if court ordered (very rare). The researcher

will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. If the researcher were to share this dataset with another researcher in the future, the dataset would contain no identifiers so this would not involve another round of obtaining informed consent. Data will be kept secure by keeping all confidential data password protected. All identifying information from each participant will be removed from the collected data and be replaced by encrypted code to protect the identify of everyone involved. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

Contacts and Questions:

If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant or any negative parts of the study, you can call Walden University's Research Participant Advocate at 612-312-1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is 10-07-22-1038555. It expires on October 6, 2023

You might wish to retain this consent form for your records. You may ask the researcher or Walden University for a copy at any time using the contact info above.

Obtaining Your Consent

If you feel you understand the study and wish to volunteer, please indicate your consent by ____.

Printed Name of Participant _____

Date of consent _____

Participant's Signature _____

Researcher's Signature _____