

Investigating the (Mis)alignment Between Expenditures and Policy to Improve Multilingual Learner Programs

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Abstract

States and districts share an obligation to provide Multilingual Learners (MLLs) with access to high quality language programs that are proven to be effective in minimizing opportunity gaps between MLLs and non-MLLs. This article reviews how local education agencies (LEAs) allocated their state-issued funding to improve MLL language programs and increase student outcomes. Findings reveal that of the total state-issued MLL funding, LEAs used 88.7% on teacher salaries and benefits, 5.1% on teacher professional development, 4.9% on language program implementation, 0% on language program evaluation, and a small percentage of funding remained unspecified. Collectively, these findings indicate that LEAs did not adhere to the state's funding policies, nor did the state follow their own policies to regulate the LEAs' expenditures. We close with a discussion on how the state can improve their function as an organizational leader and serve as a model for other stakeholders in the shared obligation of the education of MLLs.

Keywords: *Multilingual learners, funding, policy, expenditures, language program*

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Introduction

The number of multilingual learners (MLLs) enrolled in U.S. schools increased by 28.1% between the 2001 and 2017 school years, and MLLs now account for more than 10% total student population (NCES, 2022). Experts estimate that by the year 2025, 25% of all students in U.S. public schools will be MLLs (Wright et al., 2017). We use the term MLL throughout this paper to accurately describe the linguistic and cultural diversity of students and value their multilingualism as an asset (Calderón et al., 2020; Mitchell, 2012). The use of “MLL” in this study aligns with the Federal definition of English Learners (ELs), who are school-aged students whose native language is not English, and who have not yet demonstrated English Language Proficiency (ELP) on a state-approved standardized assessment that measures English reading, writing, speaking, and listening (USDOE, 2018).

The location of our study is a small New England state that, like the rest of the U. S., has had an increase in the number of MLLs enrolled in school. According to the State’s Department of Education (referred as SEA from hereinafter), MLL students comprised 11% (15,107) of the total student population in 2021 (State Education Agency (SEA), 2022). Per federal law (USDOE, 2017) all identified MLLs must have access to a language development program to develop ELP in a “reasonable length of time” (p. 1), have access to grade-level appropriate curriculum aligned to state content area standards, and be tested annually to measure content and English language growth and proficiency.

Based on trends at the federal and state level, there is a significant opportunity gap (Carter & Welner, 2013) between multilingual learners (MLLs) and non-MLLs (NCES, 2023). We intentionally use the term “opportunity” gap for this paper instead of “achievement” gap because we believe that “achievement” implies that such disparities exist because students do not work as hard as others to “achieve” their goals. In this state, 7.9% of MLLs met or exceeded expectations on state testing in English Language Arts compared to 42% of non-MLLs who met or exceeded expectations, for a gap of 34.1 percentage points. In mathematics, 6.3% of MLLs met or exceeded expectations compared to 32.8% of non-MLLs who met or exceeded expectations, for a gap of 26.5 percentage points (SEA, 2019). These gaps indicate that there is an urgent need to improve language programs to help MLLs develop ELP, which can lead to improved content area access and performance (Callahan, 2005; Brooks, 2020).

The need to improve language assistance programs is evident based on the aforementioned state-wide opportunity gaps, but the oversight on the effectiveness of these local programs is often under-managed by the SEA (Sugarman, 2016). Per federal guidance, “SEAs and school districts share an obligation to ensure that their EL programs and activities comply with the civil rights laws and applicable grant requirements” (USDOE, OCR & USDOJ, 2015, p. 5). While it is explicit that these agencies share the obligation in the education of MLLs, one critical area that needs to be explored is how SEA-issued funding is allocated by local education agencies (referred as LEAs hereinafter) to improve their language programs and address opportunities gaps between MLLs and non-MLLs.

In this paper, we present the results of a qualitative document analysis that explored how LEAs in a New England state are electing to use their state-distributed funding to improve the education of MLLs. First, we provide a background to the study along with a review of the literature. Next, we discuss our methods of data collection and analysis. Then, we present and discuss our takeaways and conclude with an argument that as the distributor of fiscal resources, the SEA must share the responsibility of how funding is allocated to improve local MLL programs. More specifically, the SEA must improve their function as the state's organizational leader with regard to one critical responsibility: strengthen their oversight on how LEAs use SEA funding to properly staff, implement, and evaluate MLL programs to improve student outcomes. If the SEA strengthens their obligation of oversight, it will address foundational issues of compliance and start a movement towards excellence. Regarding compliance, language programs fall under the purview of federal law *Castañeda v. Pickard* (1981), which requires that language programs be (a) based on experts' sound educational theory, (b) implemented according to the theory with sufficient resources, and are (c) annually evaluated for effectiveness (USDOE, OCR, & USDOJ, 2015). Moving to excellence requires educators to be "driven by a profound sense of justice" (Calderón et al., 2020, p. 21) to narrow opportunity gaps between MLLs and non-MLLs.

Funding for MLLs

Financial and human resources are needed to actualize the improvement of MLL education in every state. As such, language programs receive federal, state, and local funding to implement, evaluate, and improve the effectiveness of their programs (Wright, 2019). According to the 2018 Biennial Report to Congress (U.S. Dept. of Education, OELA, 2021), \$769,568,267 in federal funding were allocated for MLLs per fiscal year, and each state was obligated to provide at least \$500,000 for MLLs. The state in this study allocated \$5 million in MLL Categorical Funding to support MLLs in language development programs in the 2020 fiscal year (Fitzpatrick, 2019), which far exceeds the federal minimum. Despite this funding mechanism to support MLLs, the state-wide opportunity gap between MLLs and non-MLLs indicates the need to more deeply explore how LEAs use the funding to monitor the effectiveness of their language development programs.

This New England state's SEA-distributed \$5 million of MLL Categorical Funding is *in addition to* the local budgets, Title I funding, Title III funding, immigrant grants, and other funding sources. If LEAs choose to apply for the MLL Categorical funding, there are restrictions on the expenditures. Categorical English Language Learners Statute §16-7.2-6(h) states, "The funding shall be used on evidence-based programs proven to increase outcomes and will be monitored by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education" (Anonymous State General Assembly Laws, 2023, para. 17). Therefore, these fiscal resources are not freely distributed because the organization that supplies the funding (i.e., the SEA) regulates how the funding should be spent. The SEA is required to collect performance reports from LEAs and approve the use of funds that are aligned to activities that are "innovative and expansive and not utilized for activities the district is currently funding" (State House Fiscal Advisory Staff, 2018, p. 78). Thus, fiscal resources are available in this state to address the requirements of *Castañeda*, which are to evaluate MLL

language assistance programs to ensure that LEAs are using evidence-based practices to increase MLL outcomes and minimize opportunity gaps.

Increased funding for schools has been seen as having a potential but controversial solution to narrowing the opportunity gap through retaining qualified teachers, administrators, and increasing access to high quality curriculum and better facilities (e.g., Bischoff & Owens, 2019). While LEAs are given funds to purchase various resources to support MLLs, the very limited literature on education funding for MLLs have highlighted that "teacher salaries account for the largest share of school expenditures and are arguably the most important input in the educational process" (Imazeki & Reschovsky, 2005, p. 110). Teachers are critical in providing access to content for MLLs, therefore a significant portion of LEAs' annual budgets must account for teacher salaries. Analysis of teacher salaries, qualifications, and mobility, however, has found that MLLs often do not have access to qualified teachers (Education Trust, 2014). According to national-level studies, teachers who have the appropriate qualifications tend to teach within more advantaged schools (Darling-Hammond et al., 2001) than in schools serving large numbers of disadvantaged students (Oakes et al., 2019). Additionally, it has been documented that schools that host the highest number of MLLs often employ novice teachers or teachers without the complete credentials to teach in English language development programs (Gandara et al., 2008). Therefore, it is not surprising that the decision-makers within each LEA are often focused on maximizing scarce resources rather than using the funding to support research-based practices, evaluate their language programs, and increase MLLs opportunities to learn (Sugarman, 2016).

Background to the Study

This study emerged out of the authors' experiences and observations working in various capacities within this New England state. Their primary roles are higher education faculty members who support currently practicing teachers in earning a SEA-issued MLL certification. As part of the certification program, educators identify problems within their LEA and work towards resolving that problem. The authors' secondary roles had been working as MLL Ambassadors with the SEA. As MLL Ambassadors, the authors selected state-wide problems that impact MLLs and worked towards resolving those problems. With those roles outlined as context, the authors became part of the ecology of MLL education within the state. They serve as educational researchers at a public university; they support the state's practicing teachers' resolve LEA problems; they integrate their research, experience, and observations to their collaborative efforts with the SEA to enact state-wide improvements in MLL education.

Purpose

The purpose of this paper was to investigate how LEAs in this state are electing to use their SEA-issued MLL Categorical Funding. We wanted to learn to what extent the SEA and LEAs are fulfilling their shared academic and fiscal obligations in the education of MLLs. Part of meeting these educational requirements includes implementing "evidence-based programs proven to increase outcomes" (State House Fiscal Advisory Staff, 2018, p. 78). Funding-wise, the SEA and LEAs must regulate that expenditures not be "utilized for activities the district is currently

funding” (p. 78). Our research is a timely support for the local and nation-wide need to improve MLL education with regard to access to rigorous, high-quality language assistance programs and student achievement (Wang & Peyton 2017). This research is also relevant in arguing for increased collaboration among the SEA, LEAs, and higher education faculty in order to investigate problems or gaps in current structures, as well as to problem-solve and improve education for MLLs. Therefore, it is imperative that we take a closer look at how LEAs are leveraging MLL Categorical Funding to improve MLL programs.

Research Questions

With the purpose in mind, we investigated the following research questions in this study:

1. How did LEAs in this New England state spend their allocated MLL Categorical Funding?
2. Did the local MLL Categorical expenditures adhere to the State’s funding Statute and/or the federal government’s *Castañeda* standards?

Conceptual Framework

The Dear Colleague Letter (USDOE, OCR, & USDOJ, 2015) explicitly identifies the “shared obligations” between the State and the district to serve MLLs (p. 8). Because organizations need resources to function, Pfeffer and Salancik’s (1978) Resource Dependence Theory (RDT) was helpful to frame the problem of the shared obligations between the SEA and the LEAs to service MLLs in this state.

Resource dependence theory (RDT) claims that organizations are shaped by their environment and whoever controls the resources has the power over the organization (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). In other words, the provider of the resources is expected to control the actions of the spender (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). RDT also grapples with interdependence, which is that there is no autonomous power within an organization, but the ecology of the whole impacts each unit. The ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) presents a way to visualize the give-and-take of interaction that can be conceptualized as a two-directional process of reciprocal adaptation between the different stakeholders. For example, in this state, the units that impact MLL language programs include, but are not limited to federal regulations, state regulations, State House Fiscal Advisory staff, local funding sources, and needs of the MLL population. Each unit is part of the ecology of education for MLLs, and furthermore, each unit supplies and/or controls limited resources, particularly monetary resources, available for the implementation and evaluation of language development programs.

The ecological systems theory and RDT informed this study’s focus on the SEA’s obligations to oversee funding expenditures and learn how LEAs responded to that guidance. The interplay between the SEA and LEA has the primary importance in supporting MLLs and addressing the opportunity gap because effective MLL programs improve student outcomes (e.g., Calderón et al., 2011).

Methods

We used document analysis as a qualitative approach (Bowen, 2009) to analyze data derived from publicly-available documents. Public records are a primary type of document analysis (Bowen, 2009). Using document analysis, we analyzed documentary evidence and investigated our research questions (Frey, 2018). Document analysis was used for multiple rounds of reviews, examination, and interpretation to understand the data. As Frey (2018) notes, document analysis can be conducted as a stand-alone study.

Data Collection Procedures

The data set included LEA expenditures identified on fifty MLL Categorical Funding applications submitted to the SEA in the 2019-2020 academic year.

To learn how the SEA was providing oversight on LEAs' use of fiscal resources to properly staff, implement, and evaluate MLL programs, we submitted a public document request to the SEA in 2019, to access all of the MLL Categorical Funding requests for FY2020. These documents require LEAs to identify their use of MLL Categorical funding and other sources of MLL funding (e.g. Title III). We reviewed the documents to learn how local LEAs were spending their SEA-issued funding and how those expenditures relate to meeting the *Castañeda* standards. Namely, we were particularly interested in how LEAs addressed prong 3 of *Castañeda*, which requires LEAs to annually evaluate their MLL program for effectiveness to ensure that they are narrowing the opportunity gap between MLLs and non-MLLs.

The SEA responded to the public document request with publicly-available hyperlinks to each district's MLL Categorical Funding application document. The "FY-2020 Plan for MLL State Categorical Funding" has two separate applications: (1) LEAs receiving \$9,999 or less provide a written assurance, and (2) LEAs receiving \$10,000 or more complete a thorough application process.

Data Analysis

The MLL Categorical Funding applications revealed how LEAs self-selected their funding preferences and to what degree they adhered to SEA guidance and state funding policies. We used O'Leary's (2014) eight-step process to analyze the MLL Categorical Funding applications. In this analysis process, we (1) *gathered relevant text* by sending our request to the SEA by completing a Public Records Request and received documents. We (2) *developed an organization and management schema* using the MLL Categorical Funding budget categories indicated on the SEA application, and used Excel to organize the funding requests to sort and analyze data. In the Excel spreadsheet, each LEA was given a row and each column displayed the spending categories determined by the MLL Categorical Funds Budget Sheet (e.g., teacher salary/compensation, benefits, etc.). The categories on the budget sheet that were predetermined by the SEA application and served as the first round of organizing themes. Most LEAs provided further sub-categories within the SEA's budget sheet, so additional columns were added (e.g., afterschool homework support, purchase services, and external education specialists, etc.).

Then, we (3) *made copies of the originals for annotation*; all documents were shared electronically, so no hard copies were made. We (4) *assessed the authenticity* of the documents that SEA provided directly to us; all documents came with signatures from LEA leadership. Additionally, we (5) *explored the document's agenda biases*. The agenda of all documents showed that LEAs were seeking MLL Categorical Funding from the SEA to fiscally support “evidence-based programs proven to increase outcomes” (Anonymous State General Assembly Laws, 2023, para. 17).

Furthermore, we (6) *explored the background information* (e.g., purpose, context, and development of pertinent documents) before the categorical spending data was requested. We also (7) *asked questions about the document* (Who produced it? Why? When? Type of data?). We learned that the SEA created the application in order to more fairly allocate funding across the state's LEAs based on the number of MLLs and their specific needs. Our prior collaboration with MLL leadership at the SEA level in our roles as MLL Ambassadors for the SEA, as well as advisory board members for the MLL Advisory Council, allowed us to navigate the requesting and accessing such data. Additionally, being included in the SEA's MLL Director's email listserv provided us updates regarding calls for funding applications. Finally, we (8) *explored the content*. Each document was opened in alphabetical order by the two application categories: (1) LEAs receiving \$10,000 or more, and (2) LEAs receiving \$9,999 or less.

The LEA's funding application and itemized use of these funds were the primary concern for this research project. Funding requests were entered by dollar amount into Excel based on their category of spending. When subcategories were created by the district, additional columns were added by the researchers. After all LEAs' monetary requests were entered into Excel, the authors reviewed, identified, and then consolidated similar themes. For example, if a LEA indicated a “field trip” as part of learning for an instructional unit, the field trip was then grouped with curriculum and materials. Finally, the LEAs that received \$9,999 or less were listed in rows and their total amount was indicated in the Excel spreadsheet. These LEAs did not have to identify how they would spend their funds. Rather, their application included a signature from the LEA Superintendent and assurance that the district “will utilize the Multilingual Learner (MLL), State Categorical Funds for fiscal year 2020 to provide innovative and expansive supports and services for MLLs, and not utilize the funds for activities the district is currently funding from previous sources” (Anonymous State, 2020).

Findings and Discussion

How Local Funding was Dispersed Among Local Education Agencies (LEAs)

The SEA developed the MLL Categorical Funding application documents, which were distributed via email to LEA MLL Directors and/or the LEA Superintendent. The application documents included the purpose of MLL Categorical spending, instructions on how to complete the application forms, application deadlines, and a list of allowed budget categories selected by the SEA. Those categories included the following State's Uniform Chart of Accounts: Employee Compensation, Employee Benefits, Professional and Technical Services, Property Services, Other Purchased Services, Supplies and Materials, and Property and Equipment. The funding is

distributed through a reimbursement process, so the application indicates a proposed budget based on the aforementioned categories, but the district only receives the Categorical funding after submitting reimbursement requests to the SEA throughout the fiscal year.

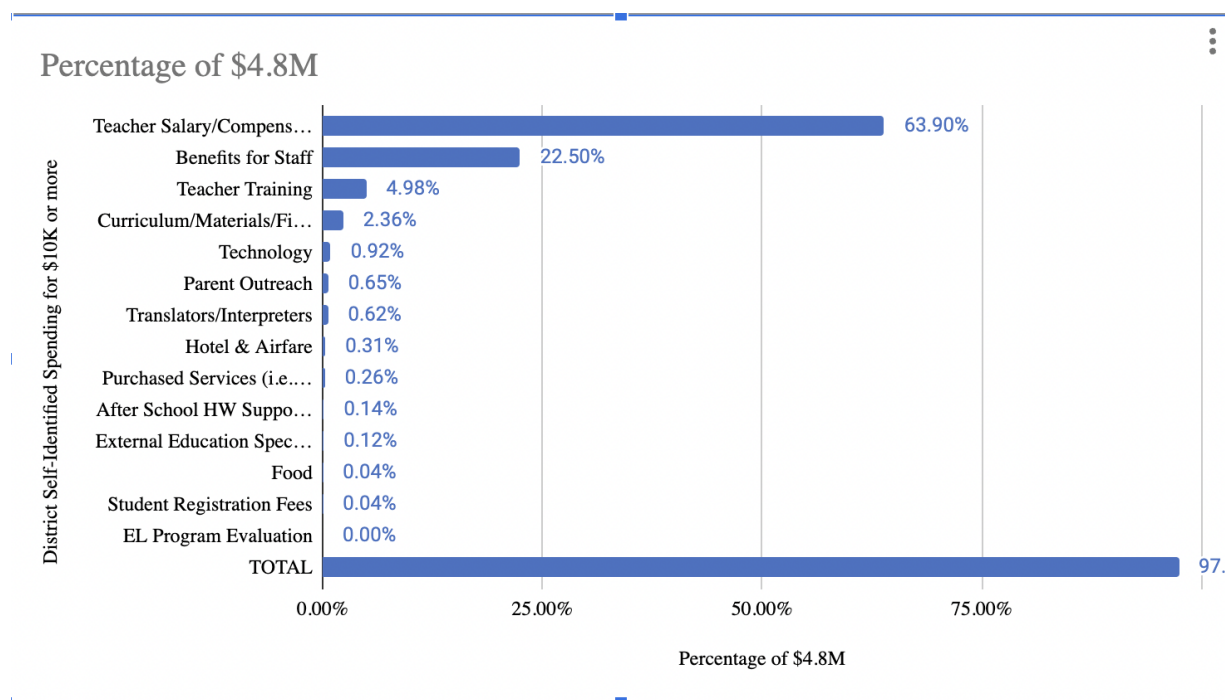
In this New England state, a total of 50 LEAs, including charters, submitted an application to the SEA for MLL Categorical Funding in FY2020. All of the LEAs that applied for MLL Categorical Funding were approved without indicated revisions, so it is unclear if the application is procedural only. Of the 50 LEAs, 23 were eligible for \$10,000 or more and 27 were eligible for \$9,999 or less. Eligibility for the amount of funding depended on the number of actively enrolled MLLs in the district; the higher the number of MLLs, the more funding a LEA received. Per the SEA's requirements outlined on the MLL State Categorical Fund application, LEAs that were eligible for \$9,999 or less provide an assurance that the funding will be used with fidelity to the regulations. The LEA does not specify how the funding will be spent during the application process, but they must do so during the reimbursement process.

The combined 27 LEAs that were eligible for \$9,999 or less were allocated a total of \$103,676 of the \$5M, approximately 2.07% of the state's total MLL Categorical Funds. So, at the initial approval stage, \$103,676 of expenditures were not clearly defined because the SEA-developed application form did not require it.

How LEAs Allocated their MLL Categorical Funding

The 23 LEAs that were eligible for \$10,000 or more received a total of \$4,870,489, approximately 97.40% of the total MLL Categorical Funding. While the state budget allocated \$5M in total, the LEAs spent \$4,870,489 and \$103,676 (less than 10K). Based on our analysis of the LEAs' budget sheets, districts listed specific requests within each of the State's Uniform Chart of Accounts' categories. We used these LEA requests to create subcategories listed in Figure 1. We consolidated the following LEA-identified subcategories as "resources to support program implementation for students and parents:" curriculum materials, field trips, technology, parent outreach, translators/interpreters, afterschool homework support, or student registration fees.

Figure 1. *How the LEAs allocated their funding*



Our analysis of the expenditures of MLL Categorical Funding (\$4,870,489 total) yielded five major takeaways to address our research questions:

1. The majority of the LEAs allocated the funds for teacher salaries and benefits (\$4.3M or 88.74% of total).
2. Some LEAs allocated partial funding for teacher professional development (\$249,072 or 5.1% of total).
3. Some LEAs allocated funds for resources to support program implementation for students and parents (\$236,713 or 4.86% of total).
4. Zero LEAs allocated funding for language program evaluation.
5. Expenditure procedures and allocations did not adhere to the federal or state regulations.

Takeaway 1. Majority of the LEAs allocated the funds for teacher salaries and benefits

For this takeaway, we investigated the Categorical data for teacher salary/compensation, external education specialist, and benefits for staff. Almost all of the LEAs in this state used MLL Categorical funds to pay MLL teacher salaries and benefits, which comprised 88.74% of the state’s total spending. It was not clear in any of the applications how the teacher salaries and benefits were *not* part of the daily “activities the district is currently funding,” which was identified as a

funding requirement by the State House Fiscal Advisory Staff (2018, p. 78). When we analyzed LEA-level data, we found that the largest school district in the state, which hosts the biggest number of MLLs, spent \$2,984,872 of the state's total \$4,870,489 in only two categories: teacher salaries (\$2,144,916) and employee benefits (\$839,956).

This LEA's application stated that the funding would allow the district to add the following positions in the 2019-2020 school year: 18 MLL Collaborative Coaches, 9 MLL Collaborative teachers, and 7 MLL Coordinators. Those added positions would "directly meet the needs of our rapidly growing student population," and the positions are "vital to providing all our MLLs with daily, targeted English language development instruction, and for providing coaching and professional development in the district" (Local Education Agency, 2019, p. 5). However, there was no clarity on why these additional positions are not included in the district's annual operating budget, which was a requirement to receive funding. Additionally, while we recognize the need for teacher salaries and benefits to staff language programs, it is concerning that the funding requests indicated new hires, who might potentially be novice teachers, which has not been a proven approach to improve student outcomes (Gandara et al., 2008). Conversely, the funding allocated for the salaries of MLL coaches has potential promise to improve the LEA's language program *if* the MLL coaches are capable of providing effective professional development, coaching, and mentorship to other teachers. In a meta-analysis of 60 studies, Kraft et al. (2018) found that teachers who are provided with frequent, evidence-based, low-stakes coaching and mentorship can improve instruction and can have a positive impact on student outcomes. However, from the review of the applications, there was no indication of how the new positions would address those evidence-based practices.

Takeaway 2. Some LEAs allocated partial funding for teacher professional development

For this takeaway, we investigated the Categorical data for teacher training. Despite significant research that demonstrates the positive impact of teachers engaging in professional learning to support MLLs' development of ELP within language programs (Leider et al., 2021; Short, 2013), the requests for MLL Categorical Funding reveal that only 5% of the funding were allocated to teacher training and professional development. Only one district indicated that teacher training would include supporting teachers to earn their MLL certifications, while all other LEAs that sought funding for teacher training referred to in-house professional development. However, workshop model training is not the solution to improving MLLs' test performance (Vera et al., 2022). In an analysis of 1,300 studies that measured the impact professional development has on student achievement, nine studies that had met the What Works Clearinghouse Standards of quality research. Those nine studies revealed that educators need an "average of 49 hours" of training to make significant improvements on their students' performance (Yoon et al., 2007, p. iii).

The research is clear that for teachers to increase MLLs' language proficiency and academic achievement, they must have ongoing and rigorous training in both research-based instructional practices and culturally responsive pedagogy (e.g., He et al., 2011). These studies include the importance of explicit instruction in academic English (DiCerbo et al., 2014), integrated and intensive vocabulary instruction across the content areas (Baker et al., 2014), leveraging students' background knowledge (Neri et al., 2016), integrating all language domains in content area and English language instruction (Li, 2012), and being culturally responsive

(Walker et al., 2004; Mellom et al., 2018). Because only 1 district out of 50 indicated that MLL Categorical Funding would be used to support teachers to earn an MLL certification, which requires in-depth study, we believe that the SEA should provide more oversight and guidance on how LEAs could use their MLL Categorical Funding to provide their teachers with sustained professional development (not just workshop training) to make progress towards certification and advanced degrees.

We acknowledge that our role as higher education faculty forms a bias in our argument that the SEA should encourage LEAs to use MLL fundings towards teacher certification. However, this argument is grounded in both compliance measures and research-based moves to excellence. Having qualified educators implement language programs is a federal requirement of *Castañeda*; increasing the number of MLL-certified educators is a state-wide initiative (Anonymous State Strategic Plan, 2020); and accessing qualified teachers can have a greater impact on student outcomes than race and parent education combined (Clotfelter et al., 2010).

Takeaway 3. Some LEAs allocated funds to support program implementation for students and parents

For this takeaway, we investigated the Categorical data for technology, student registration fees, purchased services (i.e. non-academic transportation/custodial), after school homework support staff, translators/interpreters, parent outreach, and curriculum/materials/field trips. Slightly less than 5% of the funding was allocated to support program implementation for students and parents.

Research suggests that MLLs in low-income districts need to be provided with expanded learning opportunities to make up for the opportunity gaps caused by inequities (Saunders et al., 2017). In a time where inequities for educational opportunities have increased for MLLs, a new approach to creating quality programs is critical in schools. According to Learning Policy Institute's Priority 8: *Establish Community Schools and Wraparound Supports* (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020), creating high quality enrichment programs that take place during school days such as field trips, enrichment programs, etc. are essential in meeting the needs of MLLs. When making funding decisions for Categorical Funds, there should be careful consideration of development of quality, research-based support systems for MLLs and their families. We encourage the SEA to provide LEAs with examples on how they can allocate funding to implement a program with such supports.

Takeaway 4. Zero LEAs allocated funding for language program evaluation

For this takeaway, we investigated the Categorical data on MLL program evaluation. An alarming finding from analyzing MLL Categorical Funding applications is that \$0 were used across the state to evaluate language assistance programs. Thus, 0% of the spending was for program evaluation. This is significant because the biggest school district's Agreement with the USDOJ was released almost a full year before the FY2020 MLL Categorical Funds application deadline. The Agreement's identification of the LEA's 12 violations all stem from the school district not evaluating their MLL program for effectiveness. Yet, despite the state-wide achievement gap between MLLs and non-MLLs, the significant research that teachers need to be

properly trained to support MLLs in overcoming language barriers, and the USDOJ Agreement which explicitly identified the need for MLL program evaluation, the SEA continued to allow LEAs full autonomy when determining how to expend their MLL Categorical Funds and how to annually evaluate their language program. Callahan & Shifrer (2016) argue that local level leadership evaluate language programs within their own context and use MLLs' linguistic and academic growth as indicators of successful programming.

Takeaway 5. Expenditure procedures and allocations did not adhere to the federal or state regulations

For this takeaway, we investigated federal policies on language programming, the state's MLL Categorical funding policies, Categorical application directions, and LEAs' selected expenditures. There was a collective failure in adhering to regulations; therefore, there was a collective failure in "sharing obligations" to support the narrowing of persistent opportunity gaps between MLLs and non-MLLs. There was insufficient evidence that LEAs used funding on "evidence-based programs proven to increase outcomes" because zero LEAs allocated funding to program evaluation (State House Fiscal Advisory Staff, 2018, p. 78). Additionally, very little funding was allocated to implementing research-based programs (i.e., Takeaway 3). The SEA provided cursory oversight of program evaluation by distributing an optional language program evaluation rubric that districts may or may not use to evaluate their programs for effectiveness. There is no requirement, timeline, or oversight from the SEA on how or when LEAs should complete their program's self-assessment. The lack of oversight from the SEA fails to address the federal requirement of *Castañeda*, which requires that all programs are annually evaluated for effectiveness.

Additionally, while both the state and application directions require LEAs to use the Categorical funding on programs that "innovative and expansive and not utilized for activities the district is currently funding" (State House Fiscal Advisory Staff, 2018, p. 78), the exorbitant allocation of funding to cover teacher salaries and benefits without a rationale demonstrates that the SEA provided little to no enforcement when LEAs did not adhere to the state-developed policies. Therefore, the SEA did not follow the expenditure requirements established by the State House Fiscal Advisory Staff, which is that the SEA must regulate the LEA expenditures.

Conclusion and Implications

This study investigated how LEAs in this New England state utilized their SEA-issued MLL Categorical Funding to improve local MLL programs and improve student outcomes to minimize persistent opportunity gaps between MLLs and their non-MLL peers. The analysis of the FY2020 MLL Categorical Funding applications reveal that there is misalignment between LEAs' expenditures and research on improving MLL educational outcomes. The LEA expenditures did not follow the state-defined funding policies, and the SEA did not provide oversight to regulate or guide the expenditures. Namely, the majority of funding was allocated to fund one-year positions (i.e. Takeaway 1) (such as MLL coaches) rather than investing in sustaining initiatives to improve outcomes, such as professional development for teachers and/or pathways to MLL certification (i.e. Takeaway 2). Finally, LEAs lacked an investment in MLL

program evaluation (i.e. Takeaway 4), which is a fundamental step to improve local programming and adhere to federal regulations of the *Castañeda v. Pickard* (1981) ruling.

These findings serve as a call to action for the SEA to improve their oversight on fiscal resources to properly staff, implement, and evaluate MLL programs in the state, all three of which are required by *Castañeda*. The LEAs have operated as RDT projects; they serve their own interest when not provided with sufficient oversight by the organization that distributes the resources (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). The SEA's practices and procedures as the state's organizational leader challenge our understanding of RDT. Typically, the organization that provides the resources controls the organization (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). However, the LEAs in this state have the autonomy to choose the language development program they implement, how they use the resources to fund and staff programs, and how they evaluate their program. Because the SEA's policies and procedures request, but do not require, that LEAs submit self-assessments for program evaluation, these processes only provide the appearance of organizational leadership. Based on the significant opportunity gaps between MLLs and non-MLLs in the state, the SEA must improve their role in sharing the obligations of educating MLLs and providing stronger educational leadership.

The most notable recommendation is that LEAs, in conjunction with the SEA, evaluate their MLL program for effectiveness and utilize research-based strategies to make improvements. Only when the SEA follows federal policy and increases its shared obligation to educate MLLs will there be systemic and long-term improvements in language programming across the state. Specifically, the SEA must require LEAs to annually evaluate their MLL programs and utilize financial and human resources to do so. The SEA must also audit these program evaluations and require LEAs to leverage research in MLL education in their evaluations. The SEA must also require LEAs to support and incentivize robust and research-based teacher training for educators to earn MLL certifications. This training must include instructional strategies on how to support MLLs in overcoming language barriers and being culturally responsive. When the SEA provides improved guidance and oversight on how to use resources and research to implement and evaluate language programs, their leadership will address the three significant areas of concern in the state: MLLs' opportunity gaps, teacher shortages, and MLL program evaluation.

Fortunately, individual representatives of the SEA are active participants in improving the state's function as an organization leader. Based on the authors' collaboration with the SEA, the SEA edited the MLL Categorical Funding application documents for the following fiscal year. The SEA also provided clearer guidance about the purpose of the funding and provided LEAs with research-based suggestions on how to allocate resources to improve MLL programs. This partnership demonstrates the need for collaboration and communication amongst LEAs, state leadership, and research-based teacher preparation programs to effectively utilize fiscal and human resources and improve education for MLLs. A follow-up study is needed to determine if the revised MLL Categorical application documents have an impact on LEA expenditures.

Furthermore, this study demonstrates the need for increased collaboration among the SEA, LEAs, and higher education faculty to investigate problems or gaps in current organizational structures and to problem-solve and improve education for MLLs. RDT's concept of interdependence, which is that there is no autonomous power within an organization, but the ecology of the whole impacts each unit, is relevant to this work. We all have a role in the ecology

of improving education for MLLs in the state. There is also an urgent need for continued research on how various stakeholders must fulfill their shared obligations in the education of MLLs to move from compliance to excellence. These stakeholders include, but are not limited to the SEA, LEA's district-level and school-based leadership, state and local MLL leadership, teacher preparation programs, classroom teachers, parents, and MLLs. The findings of this study reveal that this state's current goals are to reach measures of compliance. Until that bare minimum is met, they will struggle to move to excellence in order to improve outcomes for MLLs.

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