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Understanding High School Assistant Principals' Perspective of  
Standardized Testing Policy for English Language Learners in Maryland

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Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education

Department of Education, Leadership, Management and Policy  
Seton Hall University  
2021

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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION & HUMAN SERVICES  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION LEADERSHIP MANAGEMENT & POLICY

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## APPROVAL FOR SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE

**Jae Won Hwang** has successfully defended and made the required modifications to the text of the doctoral dissertation for the **Ed.D.** during this Spring Semester.

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## Abstract

Given federal and state mandates, school administrators in the United States are often held responsible for enacting standardized testing policies in their school settings. Standardized testing requirements apply for all students attending school including ELL (English Language Learner) students. However, a review of the literature finds that standardized testing for ELL students is problematic when schools interpret testing scores as some indication of content knowledge mastery. At the current time, content-area standardized testing policies and practices in public schools are not consistent with what we know about second language development. What is missing in the existing research is an examination of school administrator perspective on the standardized testing policies that they are responsible for when the students are English Language Learners. This study adopts a qualitative case study framework to examine the perspectives of high school assistant principals in a single Maryland school district. The following research question guided the data collection and data analysis: How do high school assistant principals in a large Maryland suburban county perceive standardized testing policy implemented for ELLs? Data collection involved semi-structured interviews with high school assistant principals in a single case study Maryland district. Subsequent data analysis involved coding interview data from transcription to identify overarching themes. The findings of the study were in two parts: experiential dimension and perspective dimension. For the experiential dimension, the analysis found that despite the variety of experiences as assistant principals in diverse locations, their understanding of standardized testing policies was uniform. Next for the perspective dimension, the analysis found that current standardized testing policies for English Language Learners did not achieve the intended goals. The findings of this study have important implications for the theoretical study of educational leadership and for the everyday lived

experiences of school administrators in K-12 schools. The study yielded a recommendation for assistant principals to balance the need for additional standardized testing and the loss of instructional time. The study also provided recommendations for future research. This included broader research into the experiences of other standardized testing policy implementers and their perception of current testing policies for English Language Learners.

Keywords: Assistant Principals, English Language Learners, School Based Administrators, Standardized Testing

### **Dedication**

*To my wife, Julyann, for her unwavering support and patience, without whose strength I would not have been able to complete this journey.*

*To my loving children, Elleanor and Alex, who endured my absences with unconditional love and grace.*

*To my father, Nam and my uncle Steve, on whose shoulders I stand and examples I follow.*

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Finally, I would like to thank my family, who has been on this journey from its inception. My journey would have never started without the love, support, and encouragement of my wife, Julyann. I have always been humbled by her many sacrifices which made this journey possible. It was only through the constant selfless acts that I was able to spend the many hours needed to complete this program. My two young children, Elleanor and Alex, I hope that one day you will read this and understand the love both of your parents have for you, and the opportunities that we hope to provide through our hard work. To my father Nam, on whose sacrifice, hard work and shoulders I stand. I am grateful beyond words for helping to provide the opportunities that I have had. To my uncle Steve, thank you for instilling in me the foundation and confidence to achieve my potential, both as an educator and as a leader.



## Table of Contents

List of Tables .....	x
<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRUCTION</b> .....	<b>1</b>
Background .....	1
Problem Statement .....	5
Purpose of the Study .....	7
The Significance of the Study .....	8
Research Question .....	10
Research Design .....	10
Key Terms .....	12
<b>CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW</b> .....	<b>15</b>
Criteria for Inclusion and Exclusion of Literature .....	15
Methods for Literature Survey .....	15
History of Standardized Testing in the United States .....	16
The Role of School Administrators .....	25
Summary .....	27
<b>CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN</b> .....	<b>29</b>
Participants .....	30
Data Collection and Analysis .....	32
Research Question .....	33
Interview Instrument .....	34
Interview Questions .....	34
Role of Researcher .....	35
Validity and Reliability .....	36
Limitations and Delimitations .....	37
Summary .....	38
<b>CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS</b> .....	<b>40</b>
Findings .....	41
Experience and Knowledge questions .....	41
Policy Perspective Questions .....	43
<b>CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b> .....	<b>51</b>
Introduction .....	51
Summary of Findings .....	52

Recommendation for Practice .....	54
Recommendations for Assistant Principals.....	55
Recommendation for Future Research.....	57
References.....	58
Appendix A: Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board Approval Form.....	66

## List of Tables

### Tables

Table 1: Study Participants .....	31
Table 2: Code Frequency .....	43

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

One of the earliest known high-stakes testing protocols was the Chinese Civil Service Exam used during the T'ang dynasty in the third century B.C. (Eckstein & Noah, 1993). These exams were used to determine the eligibility of prospective governmental officials and, like current high-stakes exams, determined one's trajectory based on the results (Eckstein & Noah, 1993). The idea of a standardized, high-stakes exam was not exclusive to specific regions of the world but spread through the years. For example, in the mid-1940s European countries, such as Portugal the United Kingdom, started to implement high stakes testing for students (Eurydice, 2009). The first use of large-scale standardized tests in the United States were the Alpha and Beta tests. These tests were used by the U.S. military during World War I to screen candidates for the United States Army (Tienken, 2020). Public schools in the United States utilized intelligence tests for similar purposes in the 1960s to determine a student's viability for either a vocational or college track (Emory, 2007).

During the progressive era in the early 1900s, close to 15 million immigrants arrived in the United States. Most of these immigrants arrived from Southern and Eastern Europe and were non-English speakers. To accommodate the influx of non-English speaking immigrants, planning and discussion took place in the United States around how to best design an educational system to meet their needs (Emery, 2007). Many of these efforts centered around how to best assimilate the immigrant population through schooling and English language education. Starting in the cities, where most new immigrants lived, schools began to grow from one room buildings into much larger ones to accommodate the student growth. In the early 1900s, the education system was not yet compulsory for all students and was not inclusive. Due

to the large immigrant population, schools expanded and included more children from different backgrounds and heritage. In the 2000s, the United States experienced another wave of immigration, this time from Central and South America. The new immigrating population arrived with little to no English proficiency. Children of immigrants were ensured free public education under existing federal Civil Rights policy and Supreme Court decisions. This safeguarded each child's right to receive an appropriate education regardless of their country of origin or immigration status.

The United States Constitution reserved the right for states to create systems of education in their jurisdiction. As a result, each system of education was formed by their respective state constitution and government. This decentralized system resulted in states each with varying policies and standards. In the early 1900s to the 2000s, the United States' education system shifted to include more and more funding and influence from the federal government. The influence mainly came through the threat to withhold federal funding, should a state not be in alignment with federal policies, including the adoption of standardized testing policies. Eventually, this motivated states to consolidated state education policies to implement standardized testing to meet federal educational policies.

A significant moment during this shift was the Civil Rights era of the 1960s, which ushered in a new role for the federal government. During this time, laws like the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited discrimination in schools. This set forth an expectation for equitable education that all public schools must abide by (Baker & Wright, 2017). In 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) interjected federal policies into the traditional public education system at the individual state level (De Oliveira, 2019). This policy targeted federal funds to combat poverty and provide resources for schools through grants and

scholarships. ESEA laid the groundwork for future federal educational policies by establishing a vested interest in funding public schools throughout the individual fifty state systems.

The next significant federal educational policy development was in 2002 when No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was passed. Schools were required to show growth by using the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) metric; schools that did not meet AYP received consequences (NCLB, 2002). In 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) passed and continued the standardized testing requirements as a means to measure the effectiveness of schools and instruction rather than a student's suitability for college or vocation (William, 2010). Under ESSA, standardized testing was still used for accountability but provided more flexibility for states to focus on students' needs in their state, particularly to address the achievement gap among student populations (ESSA, 2015).

The role of school administrators and leadership has shifted in response to federal policies such as NCLB and ESSA. The policies required that school administrators take on the responsibility of ensuring Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for all students, as measured in their performance on standardized tests (Noonan & Renihan, 2006). School administrators' new primary responsibilities included being an instructional leader, facing increased scrutiny for the management of schools, and teaching and learning of all students (Dufor, 2001; Fullan 2001). Such roles can be especially challenging in states and regions that have a large population of students requiring specialized instruction. These groups include Special Education students and English Language Learners (ELLs). Both groups require additional support to bridge potential knowledge and social emotional deficits.

In this research, ELLs are defined as "students served in programs of language assistance, such as English as a second language, high-intensity language training, and bilingual education"

(Murphey, 2016, p. 2). The term, *ELL*, is but one way to describe students learning English as a new language in American public schools. There are many terms used in schools between states to describe the same population of students. These terms include English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), English as a Second Language (ESL), or English Learner (EL). The term ELL was selected for this study because it is the language used in NCLB and federal policies. ELLs refer to students who are learning English as their second or additional language.

The ELL population has grown, making educational policies more relevant throughout the United States. There has been a steady increase in the enrollment of ELLs in public schools throughout the United States. In Maryland, ELL enrollment has increased, reflective of the overall trend in the United States. According to a report by the Maryland Equity Project from the University of Maryland, the ELL population grew at a faster rate in Maryland relative to the United States between 1998 and 2015 (Montoya Avila, 2017). In the same Maryland Equity Project report, data indicated that the two largest school districts in Maryland have approximately 68.21% of all ELLs enrolled in Maryland public schools. In Maryland's largest school district, 30,768 ELLs are enrolled with graduation rates of ELLs ranging from 47.8% in 2016 to 46.6% in 2018, showing a slight decrease in graduation rate over three years (Smith, 2019).

Transitioning from NCLB to ESSA, Maryland exercised the flexibility provided by ESSA by passing Bill SB0452, also known as the Less Testing, More Teaching Act to limit standardized testing to 2.2% of the total instructional time for students. This bill had a clause that excluded ELLs who are tested beyond 2.2% of instructional time. This includes those exams identified by the state to measure student achievement, such as the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and the World-Class Instructional Design and

Assessment (WIDA) Access exam which assesses ELL's progress in attaining proficiency in the English language. The four-part WIDA Access exam administered to ELLs annually are federally mandated, and are required an exception in Maryland's Test less, Teach more policy. These, and other school directed policies are adopted and implemented via school based administrators (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991). As a result, assistant principals navigate complicated policies that have separate standards and requirements for ELLs.

### **Problem Statement**

Research and data show that the current methods of supporting ELLs and measuring their performance are not successful, and yet standardized testing is still used to show a school's effectiveness of instruction under ESSA (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2018). Under NCLB, ELL progress and academic achievement were measured using standardized exams (NCLB, 2002). Under ESSA, states and districts are required to continue to measure students' educational progress in reading/language arts, mathematics, and science (ESSA, 2015). This means that all high school students, including ELLs, must take at least one exam in reading/language, math, and science while in high school. This is despite research showing that standardized exams designed to measure content knowledge, such as PARCC exams, are inherently flawed when administered to ELLs because content knowledge and language proficiency are entangled (De Oliveira, 2019).

National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) testing data revealed that in 2015 the average 12<sup>th</sup> grade ELLs reading score was 240 compared to an average score of 289 points for non-ELLs (Hussar et al., 2020). These data show a 49-point difference between ELL and non-ELLs reading scores nationally, and according to NAEP's achievement levels, places the average 12<sup>th</sup> grade ELL not meeting even their basic level of proficiency. The average score of 240 shows that 12<sup>th</sup> grade ELLs on average score below NAEP's basic reading score for 8<sup>th</sup>



grade (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). These data points show that at the secondary level, a gap exists between ELL and their non-ELL peers according to national and state figures. The data do not support that the ELL achievement gap and graduation gap is closing, despite national legislation and increased policy focus on ELL students.

Results of mandated standardized exams under NCLB, and now ESSA, have put immense pressure on public schools both at the elementary and secondary levels to provide evidence of student achievement (Tienken, 2020). Under ESSA, students are expected to meet College and Career Readiness standards, and as a result 21 states required that students pass English Language Arts and Math standardized exams to meet graduation requirements (Hyslop, 2014). This results in high school students required to pass mandated standardized exams like PARCC to graduate and earn a high school diploma. In 2019, only 11 states continued to have this requirement of passing a standardized exam in high school to earn a high school diploma. These tests are not effective in improving student achievement and have been a barrier to ELLs and students with disabilities (Hyslop, 2014). This means that in 11 states, ELLs who have been in US schools for over two years must show proficiency on par with their non-ELL peers on standardized exams and meet the same graduation requirements (Gilliland & Pella, 2017).

One of the roles of an assistant principal is that educational programs, including the administration of standardized testing, produces equitable outcomes for all students (Lee Morgan, 2018). This is especially true as most high schools assign the role of testing coordinator and facilitator to assistant principals. Unfortunately, there is little research on the experiences and views of high school assistant principals and their work in implementing standardized testing policy (Oleszewski et al., 2002). School administrators, including assistant principals, are limited in their ability to advocate and share their experiences about standardized testing (Tienken,

2011). Furthermore, research has shown that few standardized tests were normed for use with ELLs, but schools are still administering these exams to ELLs to demonstrate proficiency in various content (Gilliand & Pella, 2017). As implementors of standardized testing policy at the school level and being responsible for the collective achievement of student learning, it is important to understand the perspective of assistant principals on standardized testing policies which seek to support student achievement (Oleszewski et. Al, 2012).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to examine the perspective of high school assistant principals as they implement standard testing policy for ELLs. It was not designed to examine the validity of the tools or exams, but to gain perspective and understanding of those that implement these policies. While testing policies are made in the corridors of government and the exams are administered in classrooms, assistant principals serve as a conduit between the two. However, assistant principals have had little opportunity to share their experiences as the implementors of these policies. Assistant principals have a unique view into testing policy because they understand the broader impact and purpose of standardized exams for ELLs while also experiencing unintended challenges that result when testing policy is actually put into practice.

This study focused on high school assistant principals due to the fact that standardized testing has the highest stakes for students in high school when compared to elementary and middle school students in the case study setting of Maryland. The testing requirements for graduation in Maryland require that all students reach proficiency in English, Math, Science and Government before graduation as measured on standardized exams. During NCLB, the PARCC consortium tests were utilized for English Language Arts and Algebra, with Science and Government using state-created exams. Currently, high school standardized exams in Maryland

are called Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program (MCAP), which utilizes similar exams and proficiency levels to PARCC. High school students, including ELLs, are still required to show proficiency in the four core content areas through the exam to meet graduation requirements. These exam policies are implemented by high school assistant principals and as practitioners that have an intimate working knowledge of the impact these policies have on students, there is a need to hear and understand their experiences (Fowler, 2013).

School leaders, such as assistant principals, are responsible for ensuring that equitable practices are implemented to ensure student achievement for all (Lee Morgan, 2018). However, there is a gap in the literature on the perspective of assistant principals (Glanz, 1994; Kaplan & Owings, 1999; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Oleszewski et al., 2002). There currently exists research and literature around teacher, student, and principal perspectives, but little literature can be found focusing on the specific perspective of assistant principals. This gap in literature has failed to capture the lived experience of high school assistant principals and leaves us without an understanding of their perspectives on current standardized testing policies being implement for ELLs (Oleszewski et al., 2002). The purpose of the interviews is to gain insights on any unintended consequences that might be a result of well-intended policies, as well as feedback on how to support and refine standardized testing policies to improve implementation and student outcomes.

This case study was conducted with high school assistant principals from a Maryland public school district that utilizes Maryland standardized testing policies. This study will provide additional attention to the experiences and perspectives of assistant principals, perspectives that are underrepresented in the literature (Marshall, 1992; Weller & Weller, 2002). The void in literature will be addressed through the case study and interviews of high school assistant

principals who directly implement testing policy for ELLs at the school level. Through this research, assistant principal community and policy makers will hear about the impact, or the lack of impact, of current standardized testing policies from the school implementation perspective.

### **The Significance of the Study**

In 2015, there were approximately 4.8 million ELLs in US K-12 schools according to the United States Department of Education. The ELL population is growing across the United States, with more than half of all states seeing the growth of ELL in K-12 education between 2010 and 2015 (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). The growing ELL population in schools across the country requires administrators to better understand best practices to address the needs of ELLs (Gardiner et al., 2009). The need for districts and school leaders, including assistant principals, to understand the experiences of their fellow assistant principals administering standardized tests for ELLs is vital. This perspective can help to provide insights on current implementation of standardized testing for ELLs.

Research reveals that there is significant correlation between the actions of school leaders and student achievement (Dufour & Marzano, 2011). Under NCLB and ESSA, school administrators demonstrate a pivotal role in implementing standardized testing policies to show student achievement (Tienken, 2020). However, there exists a void in school leadership research concerning the school administrators and the success of ELLs (Fierro, 2006). Providing insights from the perspective of assistant principals around standardized testing and ELLs can add to existing research and inform future practices of districts, schools, and other administrators. These insights can include enhancing standardized testing policies to incorporate best practices for other policy implementing administrators.

It is also important for school-based administrators to have access to best practices and a shared understanding of the current practices in schools to inform their own actions (Marshall, 1992). As schools remain at the crossroad of federal and state policy and political conversation, school administrators are at the forefront of implementing such policies at the school level (Fowler, 2013). Understanding the experiences of their peers as it pertains to this area is invaluable.

This study focused on understanding high school assistant principal perceptions of standardized testing policy for ELLs. For this study, standardized testing focused on ELLs and their requirement to take and pass the MCAP. These exams must be successfully taken with a passing score to earn a high school diploma. These exams are also administered by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to meet ESSA requirements. MSDE requires that English Language Arts (ELA), Algebra, Science, and Government are passed to earn a high school diploma for all students in Maryland. For this study, we will not be focusing on the WIDA Access exam, which is given yearly to ELLs to measure student's yearly growth towards English language proficiency. However, unlike the MCAP, WIDA Access is not a graduation requirement for students and are specifically designed only for ELLs.

### **Research Question**

This study explored the perspectives of high school assistant principals regarding standardized testing policy for ELL students. The primary research question was the following:

1. How do high school assistant principals in a large Maryland suburban county perceive standardized testing policy implemented for ELLs?

## Research Design

Through a case study research design, the study utilized qualitative methods. The case study involved a large Maryland school district comprised of 133 elementary schools, 40 middle schools and 25 high schools, as well as 7 specialty schools. The total student population of the district was 162,680 students with 18.10% identified as ELLs. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics by the United States Department of Education, the national average of ELLs in the United States was 10.1% in 2017, putting Maryland's ELL population above the national average (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). This case study was conducted on just one district in one state, out of the larger landscape of standardized testing of ELLs throughout the United States. The researcher interviewed assistant principals using a semi-structured interview format. Each subject was interviewed individually and asked the same set of questions. The method of research helped to explore the perspectives of high school assistant principals on standardized testing policy for ELLs in a real-life context (Creswell, 2014). The responses from the interview were transcribed, coded, then analyzed for common trends and themes (Saldana, 2015). This research was conducted in the form of a case study as it seeks to investigate the phenomenon of standardized testing policy for ELLs in the real-world and in the context experienced by high school assistant principals (Yin, 2014). The study provided information that contributes to existing gaps in literature on the perspectives of assistant principals. Such insights contribute to the broader understanding of standardized testing policy for ELLs.

All assistant principals that were interviewed were active high school assistant principals in the same district. The selection of assistant principals from the same district helped to interview subjects that shared common geographic and demographic identities, as well as similar standardized testing standards. Interviewing of high school administrators allowed for similar

experiences of assistant principals in terms of programming and promotion requirements for students from grade to grade. Taken together, their data provided a single-case study (Yin, 2014).

The number of assistant principals were selected to provide a wide range of experiences, while also ensuring there is enough time available to interview assistant principals during the school year. All participants in the research were interviewed remotely via video conferencing due to social distancing policies under Coronavirus Disease 2019 (Covid-19) protocol. Each assistant principal answered the same set of questions in a semi-structured interview (Creswell, 2014). The interview questions were reviewed beforehand to ensure that they are non-leading and open-ended. The interviews were captured using video conferencing software with written consent. The interviewer also took written notes during each interview. During the interview the interviewer provided controlled feedback to prevent possible steering (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This allowed the assistant principal participants to provide honest responses from their own experiences not influenced by remarks or feedback given by the interviewer.

### **Key Terms**

**Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA):** Passed in 1965 by the U.S. Congress, it was to tackle the educational disparities by providing funding for districts and schools of need. This evolved into later federal educational legislation, such as No Child Left Behind and Every Student Succeeds Act.

**English Language Learners (ELLs):** ELLs are students who are unable to communicate fluently or learn effectively in English-medium instructional environments, who often come from non-English-speaking homes and backgrounds, and who typically require specialized or modified instruction in both the English language and in their academic courses. Also known as Limited English Proficient (LEP).

**English Language Proficiency:** In the state of Maryland, proficiency is measured by WIDA Access Can-Do competencies, and established by the WIDA Access exam, which examines the four language domains of speaking, listening, reading and writing. WIDA has five levels of proficiency depending on student Access exam scores: Entering (Level 1), Beginning (Level 2), Developing (Level 3), Expanding (Level 4) and Bridging (Level 5).

**Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA):** In 2015, President Obama passed ESSA to replace NCLB and brought about new testing requirements to secure federal funding. ESSA ushered in a more moderate take on testing, with states having more ways to show student achievement and growth.

**High-Stakes Testing:** Exams that assess learning and provide accountability on student achievement under federal and state law. Not meeting adequate yearly progress or benchmarks could lead to school restructuring, loss of federal funding, and state control of districts.

**Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program (MCAP):** Maryland testing requirement for high school graduation, which includes competency exams in English Language Arts (ELA), Math (Algebra), Social Studies (Government) and Science. MCAP still utilizes the same vendor and administers the same testing platform and test question bank as PARCC for ELA and Math. Social Studies and Science are currently created internally through MSDE and utilizes a different testing platform than the one used for ELA and Math.

**No Child Left Behind (NCLB):** Reauthorization of ESEA passed in 2001 and signed by President Bush in 2002. NCLB created strict performance benchmarks and accountability factors to access federal educational funding. Most states adopted the Common Core and standardized exams such as PARCC and Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) to measure



student progress. It should be noted that Texas and California received federal waivers from NCLB testing legislation and as a result follow a state-specific accountability system.

**Standardized testing:** Test that requires takers to respond to the same questions or bank of questions and graded in the same manner to allow comparison of relative performance among those that have taken the exam (i.e., norm-referenced testing). Tests externally created to measure student performance across states and districts. The most well-known is the PARCC exam which measures student competencies in Math and English according to the Common Core curriculum.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

This chapter summarizes research on standardized testing, federal policies regarding English Language Learners (ELLs), and the evolving role of school administrators in implementing standardized testing. The origins of the federal government's role in education are discussed using chronological accounting of significant federal educational policies that pertain to standardized testing. Finally, school administrators' evolving role is examined by looking at the transformation that has taken place through federal policy.

#### **Criteria for Inclusion and Exclusion of Literature**

Academic literature that was included and deemed relevant met the following criteria:

- Written in peer reviewed academic journals of education
- Written by non-profit organizations or think tanks
- Official government legislation or governmental reports

Academic literature that was not included were those:

- Written about international or foreign schools outside the United States
- Written about special educational testing
- Written by non-academic, non-peer reviewed sources
- Written with a focus on teacher or student perspective about testing
- Written about post-secondary testing

#### **Methods for Literature Survey**

Academic literature sources were researched using search engines available at the Seton Hall University library (e.g., PROquest, JSTOR) and those that are publicly available (e.g.,

Google Scholar). Search terms for standardized testing included “History of Standardized Testing”; “ELL and Standardized Testing”; “LEP and Standardized Testing”; and “Standardized testing history in the United States.” When researching the literature on ELL students and standardized testing, the following search terms were used: “PARCC and ELL students” and “Standardized testing and ELL.” Results yielded numerous articles and authors. A search was also conducted for assistant principals using “school administrator role on implementing policy” and “significance of school administrators;” “Assistant Principal and standardized testing” and “Assistant Principal and ELL.” Results yielded no direct literature on assistant principal and ELL or standardized testing, but it did yield results on principals and district leaders and testing policy. Once relevant resources were located, important information was compiled and labeled. Reference and citations found in these readings were further researched. The literature review is structured in three parts: (a) history of standardized testing in the United States; (b) history of educational policy around English Language Learners in the United States; and (c) the role assistant principals play in implementing federal and state policies in schools.

### **History of Standardized Testing in the United States**

During the Industrial Revolution, intelligence tests were developed to assess people’s cognitive abilities. During this time, the United States started to incorporate high stakes testing to track high school students into careers and pathways (Emery, 2007). According to Emery (2007, p. 28), “the so-called intelligence tests that were being developed at the turn of the century were adapted to the secondary school system” Public school advocates in the United States supported the use of tests as a tool to measure student progress (Office of Technology Assessment, 1992).

Between the 1960s and 1970s the idea of linking test scores with school accountability became popular, as additional federal funding sources became available outside of local and state

mechanisms (Dorn, 2007). In the 1960s, President Lyndon B. Johnson helped to pass the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), creating the first iteration of federal educational law which served as a federal funding source for local education systems at the state level. ESEA would, as we know from history, be the genesis for other federal education laws, such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the current Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). During the 1970s and 1980s the notion of an achievement gap became a part of the conversation around education and civil rights advocates (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). This achievement gap was found between African American students and their White and Asian peers in academic performance, namely in test scores and graduation rates.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the high-stakes testing movement was embodied in Minimum Competency Testing (MCT), in which states required students to show basic competencies while in high school to graduate (OTA, 1992). According to the Office of Technology Assessment (OTA), MCT was adopted to various degrees in numerous states during the 1970s and 1980s (OTA 1992). One of the early adopters was Denver Public Schools, which adopted MCT in the 1960s. At its height, between 1975-1979, more than half of all states had some type of MCT to measure student learning. By 1985, 11 states also required students to pass MCT to graduate from high school.

The National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) report, titled “A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform”, provided a comprehensive evaluation of the quality of United States education (NCEE, 1983). The report found that in most standardized tests for high school students, the scores were lower than 26 years ago, and the average SAT score fell between 1963 and 1980 by 50 points for verbal and 40 points for math. This report revealed that the achievement gap had not improved (Hopmann, 2008). The report caused an

educational movement focused not on individuals but on schools for accountability (Lee, 2008). In fact, in 1980, Texas started the trend of implementing testing as a tool for accountability (Yarema, 2010). It would be the first state to institute such a system but certainly not the last.

In 2002, President Bush signed into law No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2002). This new legislation built on the foundation of ESEA with an overhaul: It would provide a new level of accountability for all states and their education systems. Directly linking student performance on standardized exams to school performance was the culmination of prior attempts to utilize data from standardized exams to improve schools (William, 2010). The metric that was designed to capture student performance data and judge school accountability was the Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) measure (NCLB, 2002). AYP focused on using student standardized test scores to target benchmarks for student achievement in subsequent years. Along with the use of high-stakes testing, NCLB attempted to align curricular standards and testing for accountability reasons at the national level (Datnow & Park, 2009). NCLB also required states to annually assess ELL students' English proficiency (National Academies Press, 2011).

The most recent iteration of ESEA is in Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which was signed into law in 2015 by President Barack Obama. Through ESSA, the accountability measures put into place during NCLB were modified to provide more flexibility to states. As a result, states exercised their ability under ESSA to self-govern their approach to keeping public schools accountable, no longer utilizing specific vendors or exams (ESSA, 2015). ESSA still required states to provide data about student progress through annual standardized testing in grades 3-8 and once in high school for both Math and English Language Arts, but how they were to do so was significantly changed. Overall, ESSA enabled states to overhaul their accountability systems and “significantly scale back the role those tests play in gauging school progress”

(Klein, 2016, p. 3). Standardized testing is still very much a part of public-school culture and, while the overhaul through ESSA provided opportunities to revamp these exams, it is still used as a measurement of student achievement. How that data are used may be different for each state.

Federal policy has accepted the use of standardized exams to gauge student achievement and impose accountability to states and districts. The purpose was to use these standardized exams to examine student achievement, but recently this single standardized data point has been used to make changes that might not have been intended (Tienken, 2020). These include actions that are consequential for ELLs, such as their academic programming and graduation status. These actions are based on the assumption that standardized testing results are valid and show accurate student mastery of content-area knowledge. For the state of Maryland, the state standardized exams that align with federal policies are the MCAP. These exams evolved from the PARCC assessments and successful completion is required for high school graduation. Unfortunately for some student groups, such as ELLs, these exams are administered prematurely which blur ELLs' attainment of academic language and content (Baker & Wright, 2017). Much instructional time and resources are used to administer standardized tests without evidence that it is improving the education of ELLs (Garcia & Kleifeln, 2018).

### **Federal Educational Policy for English Language Learners in the United States**

The United States Constitution does not task the federal government with the duty or responsibility of creating an education system. This power is reserved to the states. This means that the United States is made up of a confederation of 50 different departments of education at the state level (De Oliveira, 2019). This decentralized education system created numerous paths to developing a public education system for each state each with their own policies and rules. English was established as the language of political state institutions, including K-12 schooling,

in the United States since the early 1900s. In 1906, the Nationality Act was implemented by the United States government to require immigrants to speak English to become American citizens, and new state laws mandated English the sole language of instruction for public schools (Baker & Wright, 2017). The English-only policy was implemented to directly target the growing immigrant population and limit their native language use for education (De Oliveira, 2019). These policies coincided with a surge of Southern and Eastern Europeans immigrating to the United States in the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, resulting in increased ELLs in public schools (Baker & Wright, 2017).

In 1965, on the heels of the Civil Rights movement, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was created to tackle poverty through education (Baker & Wright, 2017). Title VII was added to ESEA in 1968 and became known as the Bilingual Education Act (BEA). The BEA addressed the low academic performance and high drop-out rate of ELLs (De Oliveira, 2019). Title VII provided additional grants and funding to increase achievement of ELLs. Funding was intended to support ELLs' acquisition of language by funding English as a Second Language (ESL) and Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) programs in public schools throughout the United States (De Oliveira, 2019). While ESEA provided funding and resources to meet the needs of ELLs, it was still a voluntary program for the individual state systems. There was no language around what states were required to provide ELLs to meet their educational needs.

The Supreme Court heard arguments for *Lau v. Nichols* in 1974 to define what public schools were required to provide ELLs in order to meet the standards of an appropriate and adequate education. The case centered around ELL students who attended San Francisco Unified School District and were placed in mainstream classes without language supports (*Lau v. Nichols*, 1974). The findings were unanimous, 9-0, with justices establishing the rule that

schools receiving federal funds must provide ELLs with equitable education. In this case, that would mean ELLs in the classes should have been provided support to develop their proficiency in English (Baker & Wright, 2017). The Supreme Court based this decision on the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibited discrimination based on race, color, sex, or national origin. The Supreme Court extended the definition of discrimination to link language with national origin (Archerd, 2013). Congress later codified this decision through the Equal Educational Opportunities Act (EEOA) in 1974.

In 1994, under the Clinton administration, the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) replaced President Johnson's ESEA. IASA carried over many of the same tenets and goals of the ESEA to provide increased opportunities for all learners. There were several upgrades, such as the expectation that all students achieve the same standards of achievement, no matter their background or ability (U.S. Department of Education, 1995). IASA also maintained support for ELL programs by enhancing funding levels as was done under Title VII of ESEA. Along with increased funding, IAEA also established the expectation that all ELLs should achieve at the same level as their peers using newly aligned standards and assessments (Acosta, Rivera, & Wilner, 2009).

This imposed one of the most stringent federal requirements for states to follow to receive federal funding. NCLB built on the idea that IASA introduced: that all students should achieve the same set of standards no matter their race, gender, socio-economic status, or national origin. One of the lasting legacies of NCLB is the use of standardized testing to track and benchmark student achievement. NCLB's policy focused on student performance through standardized exams for over a decade. Under Title I of NCLB, states were held responsible for showing all students' academic progress, including ELLs, in their mastery of both English and



academic proficiency on core content areas. Title I incorporated high-stakes testing to account for all student learning in the content areas, including the learning progress of ELLs (De Oliveira, 2019). Data from these tests were used to monitor student progress through a benchmark called the Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives (AMAO). While Title I mandated that ELLs receive appropriate testing accommodations to meet their testing needs, they were still held to the same standards of achievement as non-ESL peers. As a result, all ELLs in public schools were tested in Grades 3 through 8 and once in high school for both Math and English just like their non-ELL peers (NCLB, 2002).

NCLB modified Title VII of IEAEA (i.e., Bilingual Education Act) to target focused support and funding to ensure English proficiency and academic achievement of ELLs. Under NCLB, Title VII became Title III and became known as the English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement Act (NCLB, 2002). This new provision sought to:

ensure that children who are limited English proficient, including immigrant children and youth, attain English proficiency, develop high levels of academic attainment in English, and meet the same challenging State academic content and student academic achievement standards as all children are expected to meet. (NCLB, 2002 - Id. § 6812(1))

Title III of NCLB required that ELLs be tested annually in four domains (i.e., Speaking, Listening, Reading, and Writing) in order to assess their English language proficiency (NCLB, 2002). The funding mechanism for Title III was similar to Title VII of ESEA and provided specific funding to support ELL education. The difference was that Title III funding was dependent on ELL population numbers and student performance measured in English proficiency and on state academic content tests (De Oliveira, 2019).

In 2015, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was passed, providing updates to education policy that had been in place for over a decade through NCLB. Standardized testing continued under ESSA, with English Language and Math exams taking place in the same intervals as before (i.e., grades 3-8 and once in high school). Under ESSA, ELLs had to continue to take these standardized exams regardless of their time in the United States, although there was new flexibility around how student scores counted toward school achievement data (De Oliveira, 2019). Title III of NCLB remained unchanged under ESSA. States were required to test all ELLs for English language proficiency in order to receive ELL-specific federal funding. Under ESSA, new flexibilities were granted, allowing each state to select their own method of English language proficiency assessment. A majority of states selected either the WIDA consortium or the ELPA21 consortium standards and assessments. Both were developed during the NCLB period and were a continuation of the tests given by states during NCLB (De Oliveira, 2019). It is worth noting that three states, New York, California, and Texas, chose neither option and created their own systems of language proficiency standards and assessments.

Current ELLs are required by ESSA to take the same standardized exams as their non-ELL peers, but with approved and appropriate accommodations to the extent practical (ESSA, 2015). Under Title III of ESSA, accommodations are provided to improve the validity of monolingual assessments for ELLs to create results that accurately show ELL knowledge and abilities (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2018). Federal policy prohibits linguistic modification or translation of the exam unless in specific circumstances but do provide extended time for ELLs to take the exam in hopes of providing additional time for language processing. While additional testing time might be beneficial for students to process the information and take the exam, it also results in ELL spending even more time on standardized exams than their non-ELL peers. In addition,

ELLs also must take an English proficiency test annually under ESSA to show growth in language acquisition. This is in addition to the English Language Arts exam ELLs are required to take as a part of standardized testing policy, resulting in ELL students taking more standardized exams than their non-ELL peers. Even well-intentioned state policies such as the “Less testing more Teaching” provisions still allowed ELLs to be tested beyond the limited instructional time set forth by the policy. The precious instructional time and valuable resources that are used to administer standardized exams are done despite no evidence that such testing improves education for ELLs (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2018).

Federal policy through NCLB and ESSA has utilized standardized exams to measure student achievement, but there has been opposition to the use of these exams to measure ELL student achievement (De Oliveira, 2019). The purpose of standardized exams, such as MCAP, is to measure a student’s knowledge and understanding of content in ELA, Math, Social Studies, and Science. According to the MSDE assessment website, “MCAP provides information to educators, parents, and the public on student progress towards proficiency on the Maryland state content standards” (A Quick Guide to Understanding MCAP, 2019, p. 1). However, there has been opposition to the notion that an exam created by and for native English speakers can accurately gauge ELL student progress toward state content standards due to their developing English ability (Popham, 2001). These standardized exams can only provide an approximate indication of an ELL’s understanding and knowledge of a content area, as all standardized exams in practice function only as an assessment of an ELL’s proficiency in English (De Oliveira, 2019). For example, when ELLs are trying to solve a word problem on their math exam, it becomes a test of their English reading proficiency, not of the student’s computational or math knowledge (De Oliveira, 2019). Since these monolingual exams are inadequate in capturing the

full achievement of ELL students, some argue that standardized exam policy should leverage bilingual assessment strategies to more accurately assess ELL student achievement in the core content areas (Baker & Wright, 2017).

### **The Role of School Administrators**

The role of vice or assistant principals was introduced into schools during the 1930s to support the work of the principal when the size of schools became so large that a single administrator was not manageable (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). From the 1950s to the 1990s the role of assistant principals was primarily around student discipline, teacher supervision, and student activities (Kaplan & Owings, 1999). The role of assistant principals shifted with the passage of NCLB and the subsequent state-level accountability measures (Fowler, 2013; Oleszewski et al., 2002). These new school accountability measures necessitated a shift from the traditional role of assistant principals as disciplinarians. Currently, assistant principals play a key role in the operation of a school. This includes their role as instructional leaders and directors of school reform (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Oleszewski et al., 2002). As assistant principals and other school administrators take on the responsibility of being instructional leaders, they now become responsible for student achievement at school (Lyons & Algozzine, 2006). Under ESSA, federal educational policy remains focused on measuring student performance exclusively through standardized test results. Student performance on these standardized exams is then compared to benchmarks to ensure that students are making growth toward competency (Newstead et al., 2008).

The role of administrator is essential to ensure that the needs of ELL students are met and that their achievement scores meet benchmarks set forth in federal policy (Gardiner, Canfield-Davis & Anderson, 2009). During the implementation of NCLB, test scores were used to not

only monitor student performance but also that of teachers and administrators. This was accomplished by using performance data of all students, including sub-groups such as ELLs, to view progress through AYP (Chalhoub-Deville & Deville, 2011). The pressure for schools to meet achievement goals in NCLB became a profound source of pressure and a major concern for school administrators throughout the United States (Ylimak & McClain, 2009). To achieve the expected student performance goals, administrators needed to understand nuances in NCLB, such as the requirement to test all ELLs under Title I and Title III of NCLB. This necessitates the testing of all ELLs every year, regardless of their time in the United States prior to the exam (Holmes et al., 2000). School administrators are responsible for ensuring the successful implementation of policies, no matter the challenges they might bring (Fowler, 2013). These challenges might include administering an exam for an ELL student despite their limited command of English language, or ELLs missing extended instructional time due to overlapping testing windows.

ESSA requires that all schools work towards closing any achievement gap between student groups by monitoring standardized test scores. Administrators not only have to understand the policies and laws for school accountability, but it is also their responsibility to improve student performance on assessments (Lyons & Algozzine, 2006). The focus on accountability for school administrators has led to the increased scrutiny over the data of traditionally underperforming students, including ELLs (Smeaton & Walters, 2013). Specifically, Title III of ESSA emphasizes the need for monitoring the progress of ELLs and continues to tie funding to ELL performance and population numbers. These data points include high school graduation rate for ELLs as well as their progress towards exiting the ELL program.

In Maryland, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) adopted the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) for all districts in Maryland to use when evaluating administrators. The PSEL, created by the National Policy Board of Educational Administration (NPBEA), has 10 standards that administrators in Maryland must meet to receive an acceptable evaluation. This includes Standard 2, “Ethics and Professional norms” which describes a highly effective administrator to be able to “inform the development or revision of school system and/or state policies” (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015, p.18). This and other PSEL standards reinforce the expectation that Maryland school administrators are responsible for the academic success of all students, including ELLs. According to the MSDE guidebook for principal evaluation, “The PSEL define the practice of an effective school leader to support the academic success and well-being of each student” (Maryland State Department of Education, 2019, p. 1). The MSDE principal evaluation guidebook also states that 30% of the Principal Evaluation Model is based on student growth data, including school measures aligned to the ESSA indicators.

The Maryland General Assembly passed SB0452 in 2017 establishing standardized testing limitations for all public schools. This policy limited federal, state, and local standardized testing requirements to no more than 2% of annual instructional time. While this has resulted in Maryland school districts reviewing their testing schedule and policy, ELLs continue to be tested beyond the 2% of instruction time. The reason is that a clause in the policy exempted exams required by federal law to count towards the 2% of the instructional time and as a result, ELLs have to take their required MCAP exams in addition to additional exams required by federal law, resulting in more time in testing than their non-ELL peers.

## Summary

Standardized testing in the United States has evolved over the years, adapting to federal policies that elevated their role in American education (Baker & Wright, 2017). These standardized exams were never designed to assess ELLs, as it never considered how to assess the knowledge of a student whose proficiency in English is still developing (De Oliveira, 2019). According to latest statistics, the population of ELLs in schools are increasing in the United States and as a result increasing the impact MCAP exams have on ELLs who are required to take these exams (NCES, 2014). The literature shows that assistant principals are at the front lines of standardized testing, being implementers of federal, state, and local testing policies and witnessing firsthand the impact of standardized testing policy for ELLs (Fowler, 2013). However, a void in literature and research on the experiences of assistant principals around standardized testing policy has been found (Marshall & Holley, 2006).

## Chapter 3

### Methodology and Design

Qualitative research methods were utilized to obtain insights into the perceptions of high school assistant principals regarding current standardized testing policies for ELLs. The study of current testing policy implementation through the perspective of those involved in that implementation meets the criteria for a case study, which enables the study of current and real-life cases that are in progress (Creswell, 2014). Assistant principals are an integral part of implementing national, state and local policies, including standardized testing policies (Fowler, 2013). For this research, a single instrumental case study was used to focus on how high school assistant principals in one context perceive standardized testing policy implementation for ELLs in their Maryland district (Creswell, 2014). This single instrument case study met the criteria of a research question, a puzzlement and a need to study this case (Stake, 1995).

To capture the perspective of high school assistant principals, a semi-structured interview was conducted using the same set of 11 open-ended questions for each participant. The interview questions were created to address the research question of the study, “How do high school assistant principals in a large Maryland suburban county perceive standardized testing policy implemented for ELLs? The use of open-ended questions resulted in truthful and organic responses from the participants and maximized opportunities for each person to elaborate as necessary. The 11 interview questions, listed later in this chapter, enabled the researcher to gather honest perspectives by providing non-leading questions and taking precautions to not influence the response of the participants. The interviews were recorded and transcribed for thematic analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018).



A total of 10 high school assistant principals were selected as participants. All participants were selected from the same district. This ensured that participants were familiar with the same standardized testing policies and procedures. In addition, participants were selected from multiple schools in the district in order to maximize the different school perspectives that were represented in this study. High school level assistant principals were selected for this study because students at the high school level must pass standardized exams to meet graduation requirements. Elementary and middle school levels only use standardized test scores to inform instructional decisions but such scores do not prevent students from advancing. Given this difference in the use of standardized tests, high schools can be seen as sites of the most consequential standardized testing policies.

This study provided much needed perspective on standardized testing from those who directly implement high school testing policies. The study findings provide greater insights for policy makers and other administrators by leveraging the assistant principals' lived experiences. This topic deserves attention because the experiences and perspectives of assistant principals are underrepresented in the literature (Marshall, 1992; Weller & Weller, 2002). In addition, the research is important in order to investigate policies that are geared towards closing the achievement gap for an at-risk demographic of students.

### **Participants**

Participants were recruited using solicitation letters sent via email. The goal was to interview 10 assistant principals to ensure enough usable qualitative data. A purposeful sampling technique was utilized to guarantee the most efficient use of limited resources, while ensuring that participants met the necessary selection criteria to provide relevant experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants were selected if they were a current high school assistant principal in

the studied district, with three years of experience or more. The list of participants along with their years of experience as a high school assistant principal can be found in Table 1. A secondary selection process also took place to ensure a generally broad representation of schools across the district. Potential study participants received a solicitation letter that was approved by IRB to their publicly available school email address. The solicitation letters were only sent to high school assistant principals within the district of study. The goal was to get a variety of perspectives and voices from across the district. To accomplish this, only one administrator was accepted from any given high school. The interviews were recorded with the permission of the interviewee. There were approximately 60 minutes allotted for each interview, but participants were not stopped if their responses extended beyond that time. Table 1 illustrates three things about each interview participant: (1) their gender identification; (2) the number of years' experience as a high school assistant principal (i.e., HS AP); and (3) whether or not they have experience as a testing coordinator (i.e., TC).

**Table 1**

*Study Participants*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Years HS AP</b>	<b>TC Experience</b>
Interview Avery	M	6	Y
Interview Baker	M	5	Y
Interview Casey	M	7	Y
Interview Devon	M	5	Y
Interview Eddie	F	2	Y
Interview Francis	M	9	Y
Interview Gene	F	8	Y
Interview Harper	F	4	Y
Interview Iri	M	18	Y
Interview Jesse	F	6	Y

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

To obtain the necessary data, interviews of high school assistant principals were conducted using 11 open-ended questions centered around the research question. Utilizing carefully crafted, open-ended questions provided trustworthy data from high school assistant principals. The open-ended question format assists in thematic analysis, allowing for themes to form organically and for the data to be “categorized, synthesized, searched for patterns, and interpreted” (Glesne, 2006, p. 147).

Interview questions were created to ensure that the participants, high school assistant principals, had multiple opportunities to share their perspectives at various vectors. It was essential that the responses from the interview provided sufficient data and explanation on their views. The 11 questions asked were broken into three sections: background, experience and knowledge questions, and policy perspective questions. The purpose of the background questions was to understand the variety of experiences that were represented in the case study. Questions ensured that the responses provided were informative but not too probing as to reveal the identity of the participants. The next dimension that was explored was to understand the experience and knowledge of the participants around standardized testing policy and ELLs. Questions for this section were designed to lay the foundation of their experience and understanding of implementing testing policies as a high school assistant principal. The last dimension was focused on gaining the assistant principal’s perspective on current testing policy for ELLs. The questions were formulated to provide opportunities for participants to share not only their perspective but also their reasoning as to why. These questions were at the heart of the research question and were constructed so as to help the assistant principals reflect on their work and provide feedback from their experiences.

These interviews took place virtually, using [Zoom](#) video conferencing due to the Covid-19 social distancing restrictions. The time and dates of the interviews were scheduled to provide both flexibility and convenience to the participants. Each interview was recorded with written permission from each participant. These recordings were transcribed and scrubbed in order to remove any identifying personal information (Saldana, 2015).

The transcriptions were then coded and carefully reviewed to identify any descriptive or inferential information needed for analysis (Saldana, 2015). Example of the coded data was “Not accomplishing its goal.” This code was derived from transcript data results such as “I don’t think it is showing student performance” “I think one size doesn’t fit all” “No, if the real intent is to capture what students are able to understand.” Employing thematic analysis, a close examination and comparison of these codes across the various interviews were conducted in hopes of finding patterns and themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The expectation was that themes would emerge organically from close analysis of the collected data. The analysis findings were member checked with half of the participants, who were randomly selected, to ensure that the data collected through the interviews are faithful in the themes and patterns they reveal (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The data from this study yielded insights from high school assistant principals on the strengths and areas of need under current standardized testing policies for ELLs.

### **Research Question**

The primary research question was the following:

1. How do high school assistant principals in a large Maryland suburban county perceive standardized testing policy and practices for English Language Learners (ELLs)?

## **Interview Instrument**

To ensure that there was consistency throughout the interviews, a uniform protocol was utilized. All interviews were conducted remotely on video conferencing at a time of the interviewee's choosing. The 11 written questions were shared with participants and questions were asked in order as written. Interviews were recorded using Zoom, a video conferencing software with the permission of the participants. The interview participants were all high school assistant principals from the same public school district in Maryland. The study was approved at two levels, first by the university and then by the Maryland school district. As such, all approved research protocols were followed to protect the assistant principals participating in the study. The protocols included Institutional Review Board (IRB) and those of the hosting public school district.

## **Interview Questions**

### **Background**

1. Please describe your background and experience as a high school assistant principal.
2. What has been your experience with standardized testing as an administrator? Please include any experience as a testing coordinator.

### **Experience with Standardized Testing**

3. What Standardized Tests (ST) are currently required for ELL in high school?
4. How would you compare the testing requirements for ELL vs Non-ELLs?
5. What, if any, ELL ST data does your school review, and how often?
6. What, if any actions, do you take as a result of reviewing ELL ST results?

### **Policy Questions**

7. What do you believe is the purpose of ST policy for ELLs in HS?

8. Through your experience, is the current ST policy accomplishing its intended goal for ELLs in HS? Please explain why.
9. How would you describe the current ST policy for ELLs and its usefulness to help close the achievement gap for ELLs?
10. In your opinion, what are the strengths and weaknesses of the current ST policy for ELLs in HS?
11. What, if any, changes would you make to the current ST policy for HS ELLs and why?

### **Role of Researcher**

The topic of research was selected due to the relevance it has for the researcher, who is a high school administrator and a former ELL. Having implemented standardized testing policy at the high school level for all students, including ELLs, the researcher witnessed the importance of standardized testing data to the academic progress of ELLs. At the onset of this study, the researcher self-analyzed any possible biases that might influence the conduct of this study. These included having been an ELL while in elementary and middle school. The researcher was not an ELL during high school nor did the researcher attend any of the schools in the state. The researcher has also been a testing coordinator, implementing testing policies for a school with a large ELL student population. These experiences have helped to build the knowledge and experience in the topic of study. The researcher also understands firsthand the importance of the research topic and recognizes its potential benefits to the researcher personally, to ELLs, and to school administrators who implement testing policies.

The data collected from high school assistant principals by the researcher with this background do not impact the validity or trustworthiness of the data. It is recognized that if this research was conducted by someone without the experience of a testing coordinator or assistant

principal, their background knowledge and understanding of the policies would not be as comprehensive. In fact, the researcher's background was valuable in gaining access to the study population of school administrators, due to the researcher's familiarity with the district and schools. This background was also important in capturing and translating the interviews, which utilized acronyms and programs that would have been difficult for those without the experience and background to understand in context.

### **Validity and Reliability**

Bias and subjectivity are important to acknowledge when reporting qualitative research results (Yin, 2014). This includes the construction of interview questions in alignment with a case study, which require them to be open-ended, providing opportunities for the interviewee to share their lived experience (Creswell & Poth 2018). The interview questions were reviewed by three content specialists to ensure that they are appropriate and relevant.

The interview responses of the participants allowed for a point of reflection on the personal biases of the analyst while looking at the data in totality. Such actions ensure the trustworthiness of the qualitative analysis of the data. To achieve this, various tools were used to ensure that the representation of the data were faithful as possible to the participants' intended messages. These methods included member checking and triangulation (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saldana, 2015). Member checking was done to ensure that the transcription captured the content of the interviews faithfully. Triangulation within participant data was utilized by gathering multiple assistant principals' perspectives about the same policy in the same district (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Furthermore, the interview questions were created to provide overlapping responses to provide further triangulation of responses. These steps necessitated additional time during research and analysis to ensure trustworthiness of the qualitative analysis results.

To curb the researcher's influence on those interviewed, deliberate, and neutral feedback comments were utilized during the interview. The researcher's reaction to the interview responses were not leading and were managed carefully to ensure trustworthy responses. This was achieved by limiting any affirmative or negative responses that the interviewer exhibited. This included the exclusion of affirmations such as "I agree," "that is absolutely right," or discouraging comments such as "that's crazy" or the shaking of the head to show disapproval. This was done to ensure that the researcher's bias, values, and experiences were not impacting the data collection (Creswell, 2018).

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

Conducting a qualitative case study analysis relies on in-depth interview responses of a limited scope, compared to a quantitative study which might yield a much larger but more shallow analysis of data. The qualitative nature of the research also means that the data analyzed has been limited to the one case studied district and may not represent the larger body causing some to possibly question the applicability of the findings to a broader setting beyond the case study. This research also was a study of the individual perspectives of participants. It did not look into the actual student exam data or measure the validity of standardized testing itself. It investigated the perceptions high school assistant principals hold regarding standardized testing policies when applied to ELLs. The access to participants and interpretation of data could also be varied as this study was conducted by a single researcher with specialized knowledge and background.

The study also limited the focus of the research to assistant principals and did not include those perspectives of school principals or teachers. The study also only included high school assistant principals and did not capture standardized testing policy experiences from assistant



principals at the middle or elementary school levels. As a result, there may be limitations in transferability of the data to other schools and assistant principals. The study also used purposeful sampling; the research was limited to 10 assistant principals from 10 different high schools with at least two years of experience as a high school assistant principal. This also resulted in only 10 assistant principals that represented only 10 different high schools. Although the interviews examined the experience of 10 different participants, other high school assistant principals in other high schools may have different opinions and experiences around standardized testing for ELLs. The interviewees' time constraints, understanding of ELL testing, and years of experience as an assistant principal could impact the outcome of the interviews as well.

Delimitations included the fact that interviews were limited to assistant principals and did not include department chairs, testing coordinators, student, or teacher voices. It also was limited to 10 high school level assistant principals, only including a fraction of the total number of high school assistant principals in the Maryland district. This study only included participants from one district that implemented Maryland State Department Education (MSDE) and their standardized testing requirements. Finally, only one district was studied so what was true in this district may not be shared by other administrators or districts.

### **Summary**

The case study approach was selected as the best method to complete this research. This qualitative method was determined to be the most effective way to gain the perceptions of high school administrators regarding the effectiveness of current standardized policies as implemented for ELLs (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The data were collected through one on one, semi-structured interviews with each administrator (Saldana, 2015). Participants were high school assistant

principals that volunteered to participate. All interviews were recorded, coded to identify patterns, and examined for themes. The next chapter will detail the findings of this study.

## Chapter 4

### Findings

In this case study research, the lived experience and opinions of high school assistant principals of a single county in Maryland were explored. The study explored the following research question: “How do high school assistant principals in a large Maryland suburban county perceive standardized testing policies implemented for English Language Learners?”

The findings from the interviews provided data and themes to help answer the research question. This included the responses to 11 interview questions by 10 different high school assistant principals from 10 different high schools. The process to identify these themes was to record all interviews and to systematically code the participant responses. There were several themes that appeared in the interview data, but one stood out that directly addressed the research question. This theme was the assistant principal sentiment that current MCAP standardized testing of EL students, required for high school graduation, was “not achieving the intended goals.”

The research was conducted using semi-structured interviews with 10 current high school assistant principals from one school county in Maryland. The questions were constructed according to two dimensions: one focusing on the experience the assistant principals have with standardized testing (i.e., experiential dimension) and the second focusing on their perspectives of standardized testing policy for ELLs (i.e., perspective dimension). The first section will report the findings in the experiential dimension, and the second will report the perspective dimension. In total seven themes emerged from the research, two of them in the experiential dimension and five in the perspective dimension.

## **Findings**

In the experiential dimension, assistant principals were asked questions about their experience with standardized testing in the high school setting. These questions helped to gather data around each assistant principal's knowledge and experience implementing standardized testing policy at the high school level for ELLs. The responses helped to formulate themes through qualitative coding. The interviewees were informed that for the context of the research and interview, the standardized testing was asking directly about MCAP testing at the high school level.

### **Experience and Knowledge questions: Experiential Dimension**

*Theme 1: Assistant principal participants know the state graduation requirements for ELLs and that the standards are the same regardless of a student's ELL status or level.*

Nine out of the 10 participants shared detailed knowledge and understanding of the MCAP exam requirements for ELL high school graduation in Maryland. These responses were gathered by examining the interview responses to the question: "What standardized tests are currently required for ELL to graduate high school?" Through the interview, nine assistant principal participants were able to identify the four content areas that all high school students had to test in to graduate high school (i.e., ELA, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies). However, one of the interviewees was unable to respond with specificity around the graduation requirements for ELLs, responding "I'm not sure which ones are required for graduation of ELLs."

The participants were also asked "How would you compare the testing requirements for ELL and non-ELLs?" The responses of all 10 participants show that they are well-aware of the federal/state policies that mandate the same testing expectations for all students, EL students and non-EL students alike. All 10 high school assistant principals responded that the requirements

were the same for both ELL and non-ELL students. One response, from interviewee Francis, was representative of these sentiments stated: “The same, but they’re not proportionate, because often times what we see is that English language learners are at a distinct disadvantage in regard to taking standardized test.” The responses reflected the Maryland policy that all students, regardless of their proficiency in the testing language, are held to the same testing requirements for graduation in Maryland.

*Theme 2: As a group, the assistant principal interviewees reported that standardized testing data were reviewed quarterly by a standing committee, while other testing data, such as WIDA Access, were used to drive EL student scheduling for the instructional supports they need.*

When responding to the question “What, if any, ELL standardized tests does your school review, and how often?”, 8 out of the 10 assistant principals shared that they used MCAP testing data in Math, Science, English and Social Studies at the school level. While the question focused specifically on MCAP data, 7 of out of the 10 assistant principals also shared that their schools incorporate other standardized exam data, which are not required for graduation. These non-graduation requirement exams included the WIDA Access exam, which is administered yearly to all ELLs per federal and state policy to measure student growth in English language ability. This language proficiency exam is not required for graduation and provides data on ELL competency in four domains of language, reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

The second part of the interview question above focused on how often standardized testing data were reviewed. Five of the 10 responses indicated that their respective schools work to examine the testing data quarterly through their School Improvement Plan (SIP). An example of a response that represents this sentiment can be found in the interview response from Harper, “It would be something that we look at frequently, at least every quarter, beginning and end of the year.” Harper also shares later that this process is incorporated into their SIP process.

The SIP is created yearly by each school per county policy to formulate a plan focused on student data. Schools create the SIP by working with the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) at each high school, which includes all administrators and department chairs. The SIP includes other metrics, such as classroom grades and assessment data. The 5 respondents further clarified that the focus group their schools were monitoring were ELLs, and that the standardized testing data were reviewed to monitor their progress towards graduation.

Participants in the interviews were also asked “What if any actions do you take as a result of reviewing ELL standardized testing results?” In all 10 interviews, each participant shared that the data review impacted “Student schedules.” The code that represented this was “modify student schedule.” There were however two sub-codes that captured the nuance in what that meant for the individual respondents. Six of the 10 clarified that they were looking to identify students to be placed in “instructionally supported classes” with smaller staff-to-student ratios. The other 4 interviewees indicated that they were looking to schedule “intervention classes” for students to receive supports to recover credit or work towards retaking the standardized exam or the Bridge project. The code in this case became “Study intervention.” Bridge projects are projects that students complete in lieu of passing the standardized exams after two failed attempts.

### **Policy perspective questions: Perspective Dimension**

*Theme 3: Assistant principals largely viewed assessing a student’s content knowledge to be the main purpose of the MCAP standardized exams.*

This theme was detected in participant responses to the question, “What do you believe is the purpose of standardized testing policy for ELLs in High School?” The coded response with the highest frequency was “Testing content and standards achievement.” Six out of 10 interview participants referred to this as being the goal of standardized testing policy for ELLs in high

school. Two respondents stated that they believed there was “No purpose” or they could not figure out a purpose. There were also 2 more responses that fell under the code “State requirement.” So, based on the responses given, it appears that assistant principals see various purposes for standardized testing of EL students. Still, the most prominent category of response (i.e., code) was “Testing content and standard achievement.”

Iri, an interview participant with 18 years of high school assistant principal experience, shared his perceived purpose of the MCAP exams: “I think the purpose is to gauge where they [ELLs] are and where they need to go in terms of proficiency in both the spoken and written language.” The participant further added during his response that “districts and the state look at standardized tests to measure success for all students.” Iri’s response represents data that was analyzed and coded as “Testing content and standards achievement.”

*Theme 4: All interviewed assistant principals believed that the current standardized testing policy does not accomplish its intended goal.*

Each interviewee was asked “Through your experience, is the current standardized testing policy accomplishing its intended goal for ELLs in high school?” All 10 respondents agreed that the standard testing policy was “Not accomplishing its goal.” More specifically, each of the participants alluded to the fact that they believed this to be especially true for testing policy for ELLs. This is due to the ELL students’ continuing development in the target language, English. This development impacts how effective the exams are in assessing student content knowledge through MCAP. Seven out of the 10 responses specifically identified the primary barrier for ELLs was the students’ lack of language acquisition to successfully demonstrate their knowledge and understanding through an exam written in English. The responses from participants that were coded included “If the students are not able to grasp the language, the only way to do that [capture student understanding], is to give it to them in their native language,” “I think those

students [ELLs] are at a disadvantage because they don't have the vocabulary or background or exposure" and "Depending on the level of ESOL, it may not be testing student's content due to the lack of language." These responses showed the concern of the interviewees: how can an exam be used to effectively measure the content knowledge of ELLs when it was designed to measure content knowledge of native English speakers whose language proficiency is greater?

Gene, a high school assistant principal with eight years of experience started her response to this interview question by stating, "I do not believe so." She then further added, "I really do believe that there is an unfair burden for English Language Learners in terms of how much testing they have to do, and you know, frankly, the standards they are held to." The participant then focuses on what she believed was the state of testing in her view: "It is an unfortunate set of circumstances that we're in, and so I do feel like it's incumbent upon us, as administrators and leaders in the building to try to find ways to make it as painless as possible." Gene's response is representative of other responses that reflect the unanimous sentiment of assistant principal participants that current testing policy for ELLs is not achieving its intended goal.

*Theme 5: From the perspective of assistant principal participants, standardized testing policies are not useful in closing the achievement gap for ELLs.*

When each participant was asked, "How would you describe the current standardized testing policy for ELLs and its usefulness to help close the achievement gap for ELLs?", 9 out of 10 responses were coded as "Not closing achievement gap." The outlier shared a mixed response of "To a degree." This interviewee shared that the standardized testing policy has not closed the achievement gap for ELLs but that it did at least show the gap which allows for future conversation. None of the respondents expressed that the current testing policy was actually useful in closing the achievement gap. The achievement gap is the academic performance gap that exists between black and brown and their white and Asian peers. Participants shared through



their responses “It’s not closing the gap,” “I fail to see the usefulness for that,” and “There is no difference in [student achievement],” how in their perspective standardized tests, specifically MCAP, did not close the achievement gap.

Francis, a high school assistant principal with eight years of experience shared that he believed standardized tests were “too much.” He expanded on his response by stating that “we’re trying to have these students um, do something that we haven’t prepared them for completely, so there’s a level of frustration that builds with the students, families and teachers.” During the interview, Francis’s perspective on testing policy being useful in closing the achievement gap reflected the consensus of other participants. Like his fellow participants, Francis viewed standardized testing policies as not useful in closing the achievement gap for ELL students.

*Theme 6: For the interview participants, the weaknesses of current standardized testing policy for ELLs outweigh any possible strengths.*

The interviewees were asked, “In your opinion, what are the strengths and weaknesses of the current standardized testing policy for ELLs in high school?” When asked about the possible strengths, the most frequently coded response was “Provides accountability.” Five responses fell under this code, and the responses centered around the fact that the current testing policy provides a data point to measure and compare students. It should be shared that in the interview notes, all 10 interviewees hesitated before responding, or they offered qualifiers such as “if I had to pick a strength” before responding. The second most frequently coded response was “Not sure.” The remaining 2 responses were coded as “Provides sense of accomplishment” and “Test is computerized.”

One response that represented the coded response of “Provides accountability” came from interviewing Baker. This participant has been a high school assistant principal for five years and shared during the interview this response:, “So I mean, I get it to hold people

accountable right, like I know it, I get that we're going to make sure that these things are super important." Added to this response was his understanding of the need for ways to hold schools accountable: "If you've got some bad schools out there, all right, you know, maybe there's a level of accountability that needs to be there, but there is a different way to accomplish that isn't detrimental on staff and everyone." Baker elaborated further to share that he believed there were other assessments and ways to gauge student learning, which would impact instructional time less and yield more insightful data about student knowledge.

The weakness of current standardized testing policy clustered around the code "Use of academic language for ELLs." There were 4 responses that were coded this way and focus was centered on standardized testing being only administered in English. Research shows that this has a negative impact when attempting to accurately measure ELLs content knowledge (De Oliveira, 2019). Responses under this code included "They [ELLs] have to now shift their thinking in a different language," "Don't get true data with language deficiencies of ELLs" and "[Test] does not account for the experience of students in U.S. and their understanding of English." The responses all pointed to the fact that the test did not account for and align with ELL proficiency in English. The next most frequent coded response was "Relevance" for ELLs and the exam's "Impact on instructional time" with 2 responses for each of the codes. The last response was under the code "Lack of sufficient resources for testing," which involved having adequate staffing to support testing of ELLs.

An interview response that reflected the code "Use of academic language for ELLs" as a weakness came from interviewee Devon, who is a high school assistant principal with five years of experience. Devon shared that

Up until the point where they feel proficient enough to actually take it and feel good about what they're putting on that test, I think the weakness is that you don't get true data from students with language deficiency, you know that they just don't know the language proficiently enough to express on a test exactly what they know.

All four coded response shared Devon's sentiment, that ELLs are unable to show their knowledge through MCAP exams, which required a high level of English proficiency.

*Theme 7: Standardized testing policy for ELLs should be changed, although it is unclear exactly how.*

Ten participants were asked "What if any changes would you make to the current standardized testing policy for high school ELLs and why?" All responses pointed to the same code of "Change the test." All agreed that some change had to be made to the exam and policy. However, there were varying thoughts on how to change and improve the testing policy. When reviewing the responses, the response with the highest frequency related to modifying the testing policy around "duration and frequency." The other 7 suggestions were varied, but included "changing content of the exam," "providing in native language" and "replacing English with WIDA." While responses on ways to improve the policy resulted in a wide spectrum, no interviewee responded that "no change" was needed.

Harper, an administrator that with four years of experience at the high school level, was one research participant that shared the belief that the exam should be changed to provide more "foundational math, where the problem is that the literacy piece is so embedded in the math that you can't figure out if it's the math they don't understand or the English that can't figure out." Harper also shared after providing the response above: "or we do testing in their language." This last sentiment, to change the standardized exam by providing it in other language format, was

echoed by research participant Avery, who shared “if I could change, it will have them do it in their native language.” Supporting the idea that the current policy does not provide the means to assess student knowledge and understanding of a content in isolation to a student’s proficiency or acquisition of English. Another suggested way to change standardized testing came from Gene, who shared that she believed “They are already taking a test that assesses their ability to be proficient in the English language.” In this, she is alluding to the fact that ELLs take the English Language Assessment (ELA) in addition to WIDA Access, which both focus on their proficiency in the English language. Gene’s response proposed that WIDA Access serve as a substitute for the ELA requirement for MCAP for ELLs who are already required to take WIDA Access. All of these responses represent responses that were coded as “Change the test.”

Table 2 illustrates all codes that were found through the research. Codes were derived from analyzing interview transcripts and categorizing them within the question that it was in response to. Several of the questions had multiple codes that appeared, which are represented in Table 2. Although there were 11 questions in total, responses to the first two questions were not included, as they were background questions that did not necessitate coding or analysis through frequency.

**Table 2***Code Frequency*

<b>Questions</b>	<b>Codes</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Question 1	N/A	N/A
Question 2	N/A	N/A
Question 3	MCAP exams	9
	NONE	1
Question 4	Same as None-ELLs	10
Question 5	MCAP data	8
	Graduation data	7
	Quarterly during SIP	5
	Annually	1
Question 6	Modify student Schedules	10
Question 7	Testing content and Standards achievement	6
	State requirements	2
	No purpose	2
Question 8	Not accomplishing its goal	10
Question 9	Not closing achievement gap	9
	To a degree	1
Question 10	Strength: Provides accountability	5
	Strength: Not sure	3
	Strength: Test is computerized	1
	Strength: Provides sense of accomplishment	1
	Weakness: Use of academic language for ELLs	4
	Weakness: Impact on instructional time	2
	Weakness: Relevance	2
	Weakness: Lack of sufficient resources for testing	1
Weakness: Don't provide valuable data	1	
Question 11	Change the test	10

## Chapter 5

### Conclusions and Recommendations

#### Introduction

This chapter expands on the findings of Chapter 4 to discuss the applications and implications for policy makers and school administrators. The purpose of the study was to explore the lived experiences of high school assistant principals to determine their views on the implementation of standardized testing policies for ELLs. It was established through the literature review the important role that school-based administrators play in the implementation of standardized testing policy (Anderson, 2009; Chalhoub-Deville & Deville, 2011; Gardiner et al., 2001; Tienken, 2020). The research also has illustrated the challenges created when standardized exams and their policies are applied to ELL students (De Oliveira, 2019; Popham, 2001). High school assistant principals implement school policies, including standardized testing policies for ELLs as a result, it was important to capture their voice, to understand the impact district policies have at the school level (Lee Morgan, 2018; Fowler, 2013) and to ensure their experiences are represented in the research literature. A case study was conducted to gather insights directly from high school assistant principals about their experience implementing testing policies and the impact of such policies at the school level. This case study utilized structured interviews to gain insight into their lived experiences in the studied school district.

The 10 assistant principals that were interviewed worked in the same county school district. All participants were current assistant principals at the high school level and were working in different schools. Data were collected through one-on-one semi-structured interviews using a video conferencing app, and the interview audio was recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were reviewed manually and coded for overarching themes. The purpose of the data

collection and analysis was to explore the research question of “How do high school assistant principals in a large Maryland suburban county perceive the standardized testing policy and practices for ELLs at the current time?”

### **Summary of Findings**

Through qualitative coding of the interview data, themes and patterns were found that expand on the literature on standardized testing for ELLs. The findings further add to the existing literature by sharing the lived experiences of high school assistant principals.

A primary finding of the study was that administrator participants perceive standardized testing policy as not serving the intended purpose of accurately measuring academic achievement of ELLs in core content areas. Participants unanimously agreed that the MCAP exams failed to adequately assess ELL content knowledge or understanding. They expressed doubt whether an ELL student knows the content but is unable to show their understanding merely due to their lack of proficiency in the English language. Participants shared that the current policy required ELLs to take standardized tests requiring academic language that was possibly beyond their current proficiency level (Coltrane, 2002; De Oliveira, 2019). This prevents ELLs from being able to express their knowledge of the content areas adequately through the standardized exams. This is supported in current literature on the challenges posed for ELLs by standardized testing for content area knowledge (Coltrane, 2002; De Oliveira, 2019; Popham, 2001). One possible solution, according to the existing literature, is to provide high stakes standardized tests in a student’s native language (Coltrane, 2002; De Oliveira, 2019). In the case of Maryland, while providing exams in a student’s native language might be beneficial for some ELL students, MSDE has only approved the Algebra exam in Spanish and only under specific circumstances. This then begs the question: how are non-Spanish speaking ELLs afforded equitable access to

standardized testing and why this is only applied to mathematics and not the other three MCAP exams? Literature is clear on the advantage of students having the option to demonstrate their subject-area knowledge more effectively in their native language (Coltrane, 2002). This inconsistency further draws into question the validity of the standardized testing for ELLs, when exams are administered in different languages for only some of the exams.

It was clear from the data collected through this research that the experiences of assistant principals in this case study are consistent with the prevailing literature. Specifically, the research shows that due to the language barriers of ELLs, any standardized exams such as MCAP, might present an especially high stakes testing situation for ELLs (Coltrane, 2002; De Oliveira, 2019; Popham, 2001).

Another useful finding from the interview data was the perceived impact standard testing has on instructional time for ELLs. Literature supports the notion that standardized testing has an impact on instructional time, as students are tested over multiple days (De Oliveira, 2019). Through the interview, the participants explained the impact of the Bridge Project, which is an alternative project approved by MSDE that students can complete in lieu of passing the standardized exams to meet graduation requirements. However, it was explained that only students who have taken and failed a standardized exam twice are eligible for the project. Each Bridge Project is estimated to require 40 hours to complete. There are four standardized exams for graduation in Maryland, and a Bridge Project must be completed for each failed exam, which means that some students might have to complete four projects. Participants shared that the vast majority of students that complete Bridge Projects in their schools are ELLs. At least one high school administrator participant shared that over 90% of those completing Bridge Projects were ELLs and that they all had multiple projects to complete. This equates to ELLs taking each of the



four exams required for graduation twice over two years and then also having to complete four projects with the assistance of a staff member.

This was contrary to the practice of providing or scheduling ELLs with additional instructional time to acquire academic language through their English Language Program or Emergent Bilingual programming. While it is clear from literature the importance of instructional time for ELLs to develop their academic language, current practices would provide less instructional time and more testing (Coltrane, 2002). Furthermore, the importance of instructional time and negative impact of standardized testing on instruction was acknowledged in 2017 when Maryland's General Assembly passed SB0452. This act limited testing requirements for most public-school students in Maryland to 2% of annual instructional time. This was done to stress the importance of instructional time for all students, except that there was a provision that exempted ELLs for federally required exams such as the WIDA Access.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

Policymakers should review the testing policy for ELLs to examine if the current testing policy is accomplishing its intended goals since the research indicates that standardized testing policies are not achieving the stated goal of assessing the knowledge and understanding of ELLs in the content areas (De Oliveira, 2019; Garcia & Kleifgen, 2018; Popham, 2001; Tienken, 2011).

In addition, providing standardized testing only in English makes the exam, regardless of the content, a language test (Coltrane, 2002; Rivera et al. 2000). During the interviews, two participants out of 10 did state that there was a Spanish version of the Algebra exam that a limited number of students used under specific conditions set forth by MSDE. However, the three other tested subjects, English Language Arts, Government, and Science, are only tested in

English. In the past, the logistical challenge around printing and interpreting exams into multiple languages was difficult. However, tests are all currently online, making it feasible to offer MCAP exams in multiple languages to meet the needs of all ELLs in Maryland.

### **Recommendations for Assistant Principals**

Assistant principals play an important role in implementing policies around instruction and testing (Fowler, 2013; Gardiner et al., 2009; Tienken, 2020). As those implementing federal, state, and local policies, it is the role of assistant principals to ensure that the policies are implemented in the best interest of ELLs. While the instructional needs of ELLs are greater (Coltrane, 2002; De Oliveira, 2019), the research shows that they are still required to meet the same testing requirements as their non-ELL peers. As a result, purposeful instructional pathways should be planned, ensuring that proper resources are allocated to schools with needs. This type of advocacy would ensure optimal learning environment for students, which might necessitate additional staffing in the form of paraeducator or co-teacher.

Another recommendation for assistant principals that arose from this research is understanding the negative impact on instructional time that standardized testing causes (De Oliveira, 2019). Through the research, assistant principals shared that typically standardized exams were taken multiple times and that MCAP exams were not effective in measuring student knowledge and understanding. This may result in schools administering additional standardized exams to gain more accurate status of students' abilities. It is important to weigh the advantage of the additional standardized exam against the loss of instructional time. Students that need the most instructional time might be receiving the least due to time lost to tests that are required by law. There are alternative tests that might be more relevant and valid. One example of such an exam is the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) Measures of Academic Progress (MAP)

which provides timely feedback on a student's assessment and provides targeted next steps for instruction. MAP is also able to adapt to the test taker to ensure that it is able to meet the English proficiency of the test taker and level. Such an exam has been used in addition to MCAP to provide additional information on student progress but causes ELLs to miss additional instructional time to take two exams, the MCAP and the MAP, both to assess their content knowledge.

Assistant principals shared the difficult decisions they face in implementing standardized testing policy that is not in alignment with research on how to best assess ELLs. It weighed heavily on assistant principals to implement standardized testing policies to only have ELLs fail the exam and to have to repeat the exams once before eventually completing a Bridge Project. They navigated this dilemma by creatively allocating resources to support students to give them the best opportunity to be successful. One example of such support was by reexamining how ELLs' class schedules might provide additional time and opportunity for ELLs to better prepare for the standardized exams. One example was by providing additional time for students to improve proficiencies in English. For example, a student might delay taking Algebra for a year, to provide more time for development of English as well as to ensure that students are not overwhelmed taking three standardized exams in a two-week span. New assistant principals might find it difficult to implement policies, such as the standardized testing policies for ELLs, which in their experience might not be yielding the desired outcome for ELLs. They might also feel as if they are obligated to implement policies that they have little control over. Assistant principals should advocate for what they believe is in the best interest of students while also working to control those factors they are able to, such as how testing is conducted and how the exams are framed for ELLs.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

To ensure that the growing policy needs of the ELL population are met, it is recommended that a quantitative research be conducted. This would include analysis of the validity of standardized tests that are provided to ELLs. This could provide additional insights into the central finding of this study: high school assistant principals perceived standardized testing policy for ELLs as not accomplishing the intended goal. During the current research, many high school assistant principals alluded to the poor performance of ELLs on standardized tests. A quantitative analysis would yield additional data and insights to either support or dispute such perceptions by high school assistant principals.

Another area for possible research includes additional qualitative research that includes a broader sample size. A qualitative design with a larger sampling size would allow the research to be more representative of the case study and district (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This could be done by expanding the case study to other districts in Maryland and include more high school assistant principal perspectives. Such research could help to provide additional data to support the findings of this research or provide more nuance and clarity. An alternative qualitative study could include the inclusion of additional assistant principals from other levels, such as middle school and elementary school, to include their perspective of standardized testing policies for ELLs. Such research could help to delineate any possible consensus or a departure from the findings of the current research study.

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December 22, 2020

Jae Hwang  
Seton Hall University

Re: 2021-167

Dear Jae,

The Research Ethics Committee of the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board reviewed and approved your research proposal entitled, “*Understanding High School Administrators’ Perspective of Standardized Testing Policy for English Language Learners in Maryland*” as resubmitted. This memo serves as official notice of the aforementioned study’s approval as exempt. If your study has a consent form or letter of solicitation, they are included in this mailing for your use.

The Institutional Review Board approval of your research is valid for a one-year period from the date of this letter. During this time, any changes to the research protocol, informed consent form or study team must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to their implementation.

You will receive a communication from the Institutional Review Board at least 1 month prior to your expiration date requesting that you submit an Annual Progress Report to keep the study active, or a Final Review of Human Subjects Research form to close the study. In all future correspondence with the Institutional Review Board, please reference the ID# listed above.

Sincerely,

Mara C. Podvey, PhD, OTR  
Associate Professor  
Co-Chair, Institutional Review Board

Phyllis Hansell, EdD, RN, DNAP, FAAN  
Professor  
Co-Chair, Institutional Review Board

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