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Principal agency 50 years after the *Lau* decision: Building and sustaining bilingual education programs for Asian languages

Zhongfeng Tian¹ · Kevin M. Wong²

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Abstract

This study examined how three champion principals of Asian language dual language bilingual education (DLBE) programs—Cantonese, Korean, and Mandarin—in California have navigated the oscillating language-in-education policies after the *Lau* decision. We explored principals' various roles through a lens of agency in a social justice leadership framework, specifically considering the opportunities and challenges for agentive leadership from three different phases: *foregrounding and engaging*, *planning and implementing*, and *evaluating and sustaining*. Findings demonstrate that the success of DLBE programs goes beyond the overarching language policies that supposedly enable bilingual education; rather it hinges on the bottom-up commitment, collaboration and resilience of principals, teachers, and parent communities. The blanket policies at the state level often overlooked Asian languages and the unique needs of Asian teachers and communities in DLBE schools, limiting principal agency. Within these confines, principals consistently engaged in advocacy work, such as in teacher recruitment, hiring and work distribution, and curriculum design and assessment, contributing to the growth and sustainability of their programs. By elevating these champions and their experiences and perspectives, this study reflects upon the politicized path to bilingual education 50 years after the *Lau* case and contributes valuable insights to inform future implementational research, practice, and policy, ensuring the continued flourishing of Asian language bilingual education for the growing constituency of Asian-identifying students.

Keywords Dual language bilingual education · Principals · Asian languages · Language-in-education policies · Agency · Growth and sustainability

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Introduction

The landmark *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) case prevailed on behalf of approximately 3000 Chinese-speaking students then enrolled in the San Francisco Unified School District who did not have equal access to the curriculum, instruction, and materials in an exclusively English-only environment. The case not only signaled the importance of recognizing the linguistic rights of language-minoritized students in education but also attempted to lay a foundation for designing more effective and equitable ways to serve culturally and linguistically diverse learners in U.S. public schools. Most importantly, it established a national mandate for districts and schools to provide appropriate language accommodations for emergent bilinguals and stimulated both legislative efforts and the development and scaling of bilingual programs across the U.S., such as transitional bilingual education programs, developmental bilingual education programs, and school-based heritage language programs (Baker & Wright, 2021; Crawford, 2000).

Among the different types of bilingual programs, dual language bilingual education (DLBE) programs, which provide content area instruction in both English and a partner language for a minimum of 50% of the time with the purposes of developing high levels of bilingualism and biliteracy, academic achievement, and cross-cultural competence, have grown in popularity (Soltero, 2016). Typically, “[t]o ensure that there are enough language models of each language to promote interactions [among English speakers and partner language speakers], there should be no more than two thirds speakers of one language to one third speakers of the other language” (Howard et al., 2018, p. 18). The rapid increase of DLBE programs is partially due to its asset-based approach to language and content learning and the opportunity it affords to improve the educational experiences of emergent bilinguals (de Jong, 2016). Meanwhile, other socio-political factors at the turn of the twenty-first century include English-dominant speakers’ neoliberal interests in developing proficiency in languages other than English for aspirational economic and political gains, potentially crowding out emergent bilinguals’ language (often referenced as the gentrification of bilingual education) (Valdez et al., 2016). The implementation of the Seal of Biliteracy at school, district, or state levels, which awards children with high levels of measured biliteracy with a “seal,” has also contributed to the widespread expansion of DLBE programs (Heineke & Davin, 2020).

Zeroing in on the state of California, where the *Lau* case was born, there has been unprecedented growth in DLBE programs and schools in recent years (California Department of Education [CDE], 2023)—both one-way (serving one specific target population either from English-dominant or the partner language backgrounds) and two-way models (including students who are English-dominant speakers and students for whom English is an additional language). According to the CDE (2023), around 1000 schools had DLBE programs of which the majority focus on Spanish; other languages include Arabic, Cantonese, Hmong, Korean, Mandarin, and Vietnamese. In addition to the reasons mentioned above, this momentum is closely related to the shifting state-level language-in-education

policies (Baker & Wright, 2021). For example, Proposition 58 (California Multilingual Education Act) in 2016 repealed the English-only requirement of Proposition 227 and officially allowed non-English languages in public education without the burden of a waiver required under Proposition 227. Furthermore, the passing of the Global California 2030 initiative vastly expands the teaching and learning of world languages and the number of students proficient in two or more languages at the K-12 levels (CDE, 2018). This thus holds promise for boosting growth of DLBE programs in California.

The year of 2024 marks the 50th anniversary of the *Lau* decision. We, as two Asian American educational researchers in the field of bilingual education, are particularly concerned about its lasting impact on local Asian American communities given the scarcity of research in this area. We were interested to know how advocates and leaders of Asian descent, following the courageous steps of the *Lau* family, continue to navigate oscillating language-in-education policies (including Proposition 227, Proposition 58 and Global California 2030) and competing priorities to support the maintenance and development of Asian language bilingual education in California. Specifically, we focus on school principals for two reasons. First, principals serve as a vital bridge between the school community and higher-level policymakers. On the one hand, principals are policy interpreters and implementers who engage in a multitude of contexts that consider when, where, and at which level policy change is initiated, enacted, and expanded upon to provide instructional leadership and schoolwide guidance. On the other hand, principals are also the defenders of teachers, students, and parents from diverse backgrounds who constantly resist policies that foreclose on equity, access, and social justice purposes (Brooks et al., 2010; Hornberger & Johnson, 2007; Menken & García, 2010). Secondly, while a significant number of studies have examined the effectiveness of DLBE programs and teachers and students' experiences within these programs (Collier & Thomas, 2004; Lindholm-Leary & Genesee, 2014; Tedick & Wesely, 2015), there has been limited research specifically on DLBE principalship and its associated opportunities and challenges. Therefore, we intentionally selected three champion principals of different *Asian* language DLBE¹ programs (Cantonese, Korean, and Mandarin), who have continuously participated in and supported the development of Asian language bilingual education, and provided transformative opportunities for Asian language and culture maintenance across generations. We aim to address the following two questions in this study:

1. What roles have these three champion principals played in supporting the development of Asian language DLBE programs while navigating the shifts in language-in-education policies after the *Lau* decision in California?

¹ We use “*Asian* language DLBE programs” through a strategic essentialism lens (in accordance with AsianCrit) to build coalitions with other Asian languages. We acknowledge the disparities in power and representation within the linguistic landscape of Asian languages, such as Cantonese, Khmer, Tagalog, and Vietnamese compared to more dominant languages like Mandarin and Korean.

2. What have been key opportunities and challenges of principals affecting the growth and sustainability of these Asian language DLBE programs?

Literature review

The politicized path to bilingual education in California after the *Lau* case

The path to bilingual education in the U.S. has always been highly politicized and fraught with complexity, shifting between tolerance and repression at different times and places even after the *Lau* victory (Gándara & Escamilla, 2017). In fact, public schools often operate to promote immigrant students' transition to English without demonstrating genuine interest in maintaining or developing minoritized students' bilingualism (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). Furthermore, the term "bilingual" has been silenced especially since the passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) at the national level in 2002. Some examples are the key name changes reflected in federal offices in Washington, D.C.: the renaming of *Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs* (OBEMLA) to the *Office of English Language Acquisition* (OELA), and the *National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education* (NCBE) being renamed as *National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition* (NCELA), which are indicative of the shifts in educational goals away from bilingual education (García, 2009). There are, however, continuous efforts from both grassroots and state level policies to revive bilingualism amidst the prevailing monoglossic and hegemonic language ideologies and policies, such as the development of community-based bilingual programs (e.g., after-school and weekend programs) and the implementation of the Seal of Biliteracy (Heineke & Davin, 2020).

Against this backdrop, California experienced a bumpy journey with provisions for bilingual education. California became one of the three states, along with Arizona and Massachusetts, that passed an anti-bilingual education law—Proposition 227, a voter-led initiative approved by a majority of voters during the June 1998 election. It adopted restrictive English-only policies in public schools, resulting in a significant reduction of bilingual education programs and severely limiting emergent bilinguals' access to home language instruction. This was then repealed by California's Proposition 58 (another voter-led initiative) in 2016, which provided school districts with greater flexibility to design their own programs to better serve emergent bilinguals. Dual language immersion (DLI; the official term used in California) programs have dramatically grown ever since, and continue to grow due to the launch of Global California 2030 in 2018, whose mission is to "equip students with world language skills to better appreciate and more fully engage with the rich and diverse mixture of cultures, heritages, and languages found in California and the world, while also preparing them to succeed in the global economy" (CDE, 2018, p. 4). While on the surface this demonstrates an asset-based orientation towards bilingual education, DLI programs—for Spanish and Mandarin, in particular—in California have gradually prioritized white, English-speaking and/or middle-class students' identities, interests, and needs, leading to the gentrification of bilingual education and commodification of language and multiculturalism for the capitalist

enterprise (Morales & Maravilla, 2019; Valdez et al., 2016). Such gentrification begs the question of for whom DLI programs are serving because “the attention to improving the educational opportunities of minoritized students that had always been so important to bilingual education became muddled or erased” (Sánchez et al., 2018, p. 40). On a further note, we choose henceforth to use the term dual language **bilingual** education (DLBE) to refer to DLI programs in California. By putting what Crawford (2004) has called “the B word” back into the discourse, we emphasize the ultimate goal of developing and sustaining bilingualism, and reclaim the critical orientation of bilingual education to empower language-minoritized communities (Wong & Tian, 2022).

Principals in DLBE programs

Principals play a crucial role in contributing to the growth, direction and sustainability of DLBE programs and addressing the needs of historically marginalized students against a politicized bilingual education landscape in the U.S. Given the multifaceted and multi-layered process of DLBE implementation, principals interface with actors at every level of an organization, negotiating their own interpretations of language policies amidst the multiple ideologies, purposes, and goals of their stakeholders (Hornberger & Johnson, 2007). Therefore, “[s]chool leaders—particularly principals—are extremely influential in shaping a school’s language policy and the overall quality of schooling that emergent bilinguals receive” (Menken, 2017, p. 2).

While the research on DLBE principalship is limited, a small number of studies have examined the potential leadership skills and traits that DLBE principals should possess and the different roles they may play to ensure DLBE program success with a focus on equity and social justice. Hunt (2011) found in her research in three established DLBE elementary school programs in New York City that a commitment to bilingualism and multiculturalism, collaboration and shared leadership with staff, and trusting relationships and flexibility were effective DLBE principal qualities. Similarly, based on interview and survey data of DLBE school principals in Utah, Rocque et al. (2016) identified unique characteristics that are important to DLBE principals, such as knowledge of culture and language, recruiting and hiring, in addition to general leadership skills that are applicable to all school settings (e.g., involvement in and knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, communication, affirmation, and contingent awards) (Marzano et al., 2005). While second language proficiency was not seen as a must-have skill, some principals mentioned that speaking the partner language taught in the school allowed them to more effectively communicate with students, parents, and staff and to be involved in the planning and implementation of DLBE curriculum, instruction and assessment. Furthermore, this study pinpointed five essential roles for DLBE principals—immersion guru, immersion proponent, immersion overseer, cultural unifier, and agent of change, explained in Table 1.

Other studies describe how principals’ beliefs and ideological discourses may affect the development and implementation of DLBE programs. For instance, Menken and Solorza (2015) conducted a study to understand how New York City school

Table 1 Five essential roles for DLBE principals

Role	Definition
Immersion guru	A principal who has specialized knowledge on all things related to DLBE and is a visionary thinker
Immersion proponent	A principal who is an advocate, supporter, champion, and promoter of bi/multi-lingual education and DLBE programs
Immersion overseer	A principal who manages different moving parts of a DLBE program to maintain its growth and sustainability, from teacher and student recruitment to quality control of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, and to communicate with various stakeholders in the whole school community
Cultural unifier	A principal who promotes cross-cultural connections across diverse communities and creates a multicultural climate within DLBE programs
Agent of change	A principal who is flexible, creative, and innovative and strives to make a transformative impact on culturally and linguistically diverse communities via DLBE

principals made decisions to maintain or dismantle DLBE programs during a restrictive U.S. language policy period, No Child Left Behind (NCLB). They found that principals who were knowledgeable about bilingualism and believed in children's home languages as a resource advocated for bilingual education and protected their DLBE programming choices in the face of top-down monolingual pressures whereas principals who held limited or deficit understandings of linguistic diversity changed their program model to English as a Second language (ESL). In another study conducted by Bernstein et al. (2020) with Spanish–English DLBE principals in Arizona and California, they discovered that principals who adopted instrumental/neoliberal discourses saw DLBE as a way to compete with other schools and to increase students' job competitiveness at a global market, shifting away from serving Latinx communities and even excluding emergent bilinguals. On the contrary, principals who drew on equity/social justice discourses understood DLBE programs from a sociohistorical perspective, “working toward undoing past discriminatory harms, by teaching (minoritized) children to develop their voices as active and engaged citizens working for social transformation” (p. 673). In summary, it is evident that principals' ideologies and viewpoints can have either favorable or adverse effects on the outcomes of a DLBE program.

Given the importance of principals in creating and impacting the trajectories of DLBE programs, more research is needed to offer nuance to our understanding of DLBE principalship, for example, how principals navigate oscillating language-in-education policies at the macro level while promoting the growth and sustainability of DLBE at the micro program/school level. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by examining how principals of Asian language DLBE programs in California interpret and negotiate with the shifts in policies after the *Lau* decision, and the opportunities and challenges emerging from the process. Furthermore, with the focus on principals of Asian descent, we hope that this research will contribute to the emerging studies on Asian American school leadership (e.g., Ee & Son, in press; Morita-Mullaney & Greene, 2015; Morita-Mullaney & Nguyen, 2023).

Theoretical framework

Agency in top-down and bottom-up language policy planning

Language policy planning can be understood through interrelated components of language ideologies, language practices, and language management (Spolsky, 2009, 2018). Focusing on DLBE policy changes at the national and state levels in the United States, this study considers how principals specifically engage in language management, which can include factors such as the introduction of the Asian language into the education program and the expansion or capacity building of dual language instruction in their specific contexts.

To better understand how school principals navigate language policy and planning, this study must consider the role of agency in language management. Agency, defined as the “intention or the capability of an individual to act, initiate, self-regulate, or make differences or changes to their situation” (Liddicoat & Taylor-Leech, 2014, p. 1), can be understood in the macro-, micro-, and meso levels of language policy planning (Ali & Hamid, 2018; Bouchard & Glasgow, 2018; Liddicoat & Taylor-Leech, 2014) within the layers of language policymaking (see Ricento & Hornberger, 1996; Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997). Actors within a policy environment have the potential to interpret and translate language policies, making dynamic choices and decisions that affect the implementation in the language context (Ball et al., 2012; Spolsky, 2009; Wright et al., 2022). For this reason, principals—who serve at the meso-level in language policy planning—can be seen as actors in the school environment who interpret policy and initiate, enact, and expand upon language policies in their specific contexts. While language planning research has traditionally examined the influence of macro level activities, studies on individual agency highlight the importance of implementation at the micro and meso levels that center individual actors on the ground and in the community. In a DLBE context, these individuals at the micro and meso levels are likely to be speakers of the minoritized language and/or are members of the culture or community (e.g., Chimbutane, 2018; Liddicoat & Taylor-Leech, 2014).

Principals as policy interpreters and implementers engage in a number of contexts that consider when, where, and at which level policy change is initiated, implemented, and expanded upon (Menken & Solorza, 2015; Morita-Mullaney & Chestnut, 2022). Generally, “top-down” and “bottom-up” change processes are used in language planning research (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997). More recently, scholars have considered the “in between” or meso levels that disrupt this top-down and bottom-up dichotomy (Kosonen & Benson, 2021). To identify actors and consider agency at various levels of language planning, bottom-up (or micro) actors include individuals, teachers, families, whole classrooms, or specific communities. These micro actors are often members of the ethnolinguistic communities with unifying concerns about the relevance of their languages in schools and society. The meso level can include civil society actors like local NGOs, associations with affiliations to education (e.g., parent-teacher organizations, worker

unions). Meanwhile at the macro level are often central governmental agencies (e.g., the Department of Education) and legislative bodies, which release officially written education policy statements, and national curriculum decisions.

Agency within a social justice leadership framework for DLBE principals

Related to this discussion of agency in top-down and bottom-up language policy planning are specific actors within the school ecosystem who serve as mediators—policy interpreters and policy implementers—at the meso level. Principals often inhabit meso-spaces, playing pivotal roles in creating equitable school environments and systems that promote social justice for members of their communities. Yet, the capacity and influence that principals have in advocating for social justice can be affected by the level of agency they possess within their role. Exploring the role of principals of DLBE schools in the United States, DeMatthews and Izquierdo (2018) reviewed scholarship focused on dual language education, social justice leadership, and the new Professional Standards for Educational Leadership to present a conceptual article for a social justice leadership framework for principals pursuing DLBE, particularly in the Spanish–English learning context for Latinx communities. The purpose of the framework was to offer a multi-dimensional social justice perspective that addressed the unique learning needs of students, while simultaneously valuing parent engagement and centering the cultural/linguistic assets of students and the communities to which they belong. We acknowledge that the Latinx and Spanish-speaking communities have experiences that are distinct from Asian and Asian American communities in the U.S.; however, there are no frameworks to our knowledge for understanding principal leadership in DLBE contexts that promote Asian languages. Recognizing the heterogeneity of individuals both within and between each group, there are some intersectional experiences surrounding language, race, and immigration that suggest DeMatthews and Izquierdo’s (2018) framework may be helpful.

A social justice perspective in dual language leadership contexts, offered by DeMatthews and Izquierdo (2018), necessitates thinking about “school and community simultaneously across different policies, curriculum and pedagogical approaches, and family engagement strategies” (p. 62). These interconnected and overlapping priorities in dual language leadership were examined by how principals *foreground* and *engage*, *plan* and *implement*, and *evaluate* and *sustain* dual language as “arbiters” of language education policies and provisions (Menken, 2008). Theorizing notions of principal agency against this framework to promote social justice, *foregrounding* and *engagement* occur when principals exercise their agency to engage in a needs assessment of all stakeholders. In other words, interpreting language policies and provisions that directly impact them, principals use their platforms to recruit, hire, and retain teachers, and go into the neighborhood to understand parent and community needs. To effectively *plan* and *implement* programs towards social justice, principals must exercise agency by interpreting language-in-education policies to mobilize resources (e.g., financial, human, curricular). With their platform, they have potential to create opportunities for professional development for teachers, staff, and parent communities. Finally, principals are

instrumental in *evaluating* and *sustaining* DLBE programs, advocating for and implementing continuous improvement practices that respond to external language-in-education policies and governing priorities. When empowered, principals can assess the quality of bilingual instruction, curricular effectiveness, and community engagement to promote sustainability. Extending DeMatthews and Izquierdo's (2018) framework, this study considers how agency differentially (i.e., positively or negatively) affects principals' capacity to foreground and engage, plan and implement, evaluate and sustain towards social justice in DLBE schools.

Methods

The present study employs a qualitative interview (Maxwell, 2009) as methodology to explore how champion principals of Asian language DLBE programs navigated opportunities and challenges to initiate, grow, and sustain their programs through decades of evolving language policies. This method allowed us to center the voices and experiences of different principals and gain an in-depth understanding of convergent and divergent issues concerning Asian language bilingual education development in California 50 years after the *Lau* decision.

Participants

We define champion principals of DLBE programs as fierce advocates for bilingual education and actors who navigate oscillating language-in-education policies and competing priorities to continuously provide and sustain transformative opportunities to promote bilingual education for minoritized languages. Specifically, we identified participants in this study using purposeful sampling (Emmel, 2013) with the following characteristics as inclusion criteria: they were (1) of Asian descent, (2) principals working in an Asian language DLBE program in California, and (3) champions in DLBE leadership (as defined above) who have been working in Asian language bilingual education for at least a decade. Based on our criteria and recognizing the heterogeneity within Asian languages, we intentionally invited principals from different Asian language communities and three of them accepted our invitation. These three principals represented Mandarin, Korean, and Cantonese DLBE programs. They had served in K-12 schools for more than 20 years and served as principals from 8 to 16 years. Moreover, each of their schools and programs had been established for at least 10 years and were situated in large, urban areas. Table 2 offers more detailed information of the principals and the schools, including the background and tenure of each principal, as well as the models and contexts of bilingual schools and districts that serve as background context for each interview.

Positionality

Zhongfeng identifies as a first-generation immigrant originally from China, and a multilingual speaker of Mandarin, English, and Cantonese. Informed by his

Table 2 Characteristics of principal participants and schools

	School 1	School 2	School 3
Principal characteristics			
Surname (pseudonym)	Tsai	Kim	Chan
Years in K-12 Schools	20+	25+	30+
Years of Principalship	16	8	11
Race	Asian (Chinese)	Asian (Korean)	Asian (Chinese)
Language(s) Spoken	Mandarin, English	Korean, English	Cantonese, English
Gender	Female	Female	Female
School characteristics			
Asian Language Taught	Mandarin	Korean	Cantonese
Year DLBE Established	10+ years ago	10+ years ago	10+ years ago
Language Strands	4 Mandarin DLBE 2 Spanish DLBE	Korean DLBE Program within School	Whole School Cantonese DLBE
Heritage-Speakers in Neighborhood Community	Spanish, Mandarin	Spanish	Cantonese, Mandarin
DLBE Program Model	50/50	80/20	90/10 to 50/50
Student demographics			
African American	5%	1%	2%
Asian	23%	12%	72%
Hispanic/Latino	25%	80%	3%
Multiracial	32%	5%	18%
White	10%	2%	5%
School district characteristics			
Size	Large	Large	Large
Geographic type	Urban	Urban	Urban
Demographics	Multiracial/multicultural	Multiracial/multicultural	Multiracial/multicultural

background, his research seeks to broaden linguistic representation and amplify Asian American voices in bilingual education. Kevin is a trilingual Cantonese, English, and Mandarin speaker born and raised in Hong Kong where he was also a public elementary school teacher. He identifies as transnational and Multiracial² and raises two Multiracial children multilingually in California, and has enrolled his eldest child in a Mandarin DLBE school for kindergarten.

With a common goal to promote cultural and linguistic pluralism and justice in K-12 schools, both authors have conducted research on teaching and learning in

² We recognize racialized groups such as White, Asian, Black, Pacific Islander, American Indian, Latinx, and Middle Eastern/North African, and capitalize “Multiracial” as a distinct, racialized group to challenge monoracial categories and acknowledge their unique experiences (Atkin et al., 2022).

Mandarin DLBE contexts. Together we co-edited a special issue addressing Chinese-English bilingual education in the U.S. (Wong & Tian, 2022), which included a paper contribution co-authored by Principal Chan and her colleagues at other institutions in California. It was then that we got to know Principal Chan's equity-oriented work, grounded in local Asian American communities. Therefore, we decided to invite her back to participate in this interview.

Principal Kim was highly recommended by an expert in the field of bilingual education for Asian languages, because of her strong leadership in a Korean DLBE program and dedication to supporting Asian language bilingual education in California. She quickly and enthusiastically accepted our invitation to participate in the interview to share her experiences. As for Principal Tsai, Kevin met her through Mandarin DLBE circles in California but had not interacted with her beyond an initial conversation and email exchange. She was invited because of her rich experience as a principal of a local Mandarin DLBE program (she had the most years as a principal among the three) and long-term involvement in Asian language bilingual education.

As researchers and teacher educators (also as a father for Kevin) invested in Asian language DLBE programs, we engaged with each principal to build rapport, and ask follow up questions that allowed principals to expand on their perspectives and lived experiences. In this sense, findings from interviews were co-constructed and a result of the dialogue between the authors and each principal.

Data collection

To address our research questions, we co-designed a semi-structured interview protocol over several meetings (see Appendix I) that explored three main topics with the *Lau* decision as the main backdrop. These constructs included questions pertaining to the participants' history of principalship and advocacy efforts; critical shifts in their bilingual education programs; and future hopes and insights. One-on-one interviews were conducted with each champion principal of Asian language DLBE programs in Fall 2023 and ranged from 60 to 75 min in duration. They were conducted using Zoom virtual conferencing software with accompanying audio recording transcriptions to support data analysis.

Data analysis

Analysis centered on understanding the perspectives of champion principals of Asian language bilingual education programs in light of their roles, opportunities and challenges navigating the shifting language policies that have governed language education after the *Lau* decision. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed using an iterative deductive and inductive coding method (Saldaña, 2012). Specifically, principal agency within a social justice leadership framework across the different phases (DeMatthews & Izquierdo, 2018) was used as a lens to deductively analyze the data, and thematic coding was used for the sub-data under each phase. For example, after selecting excerpts of data under *Foregrounding/Engaging*, "choosing

to engage parents as stakeholders,” “tensions between world language and heritage language,” and “parents as catalyst; principal as broker” emerged as initial codes. Subsequently, these small codes were grouped into a larger theme “bottom-up parent engagement as catalyst to establish DLBE programs.” Likewise, under *Planning/Implementing*, codes such as “capacity building,” “added workload,” “curriculum integrity” and “under resourced materials and assessments” led to the theme “Inadequate resources from district for biliteracy teaching and learning.” To uphold the integrity of the data analysis process, transcripts were analyzed independently by the authors followed by periodic meetings to collectively discuss codes, categories, explanations, and interpretations of themes until agreement was reached. Themes were then shared with participants via email for member checking to uphold the validity of findings. All participants agreed with the stated themes (found below) and did not have any additions or amendments.

Findings

The findings from this study are organized by DeMatthews and Izquierdo’s (2018) social justice leadership framework, offering insights into principals’ negotiations of agency against a backdrop of shifting language-in-education policies after the *Lau* decision.

Foregrounding and engaging

Bottom-up parent engagement as catalyst to establish DLBE programs. Parent engagement played an instrumental and catalyzing role in establishing DLBE programs for Asian languages in the community. Through connections with newly appointed principals, parent communities demonstrated a strong desire for Asian language DLBE programs and were foundational, bottom-up forces that facilitated their establishment. Principals functioned as interpreters and implementers of language policies who were attuned to the needs of parent communities and assumed the crucial role as brokers between the community and school district leaders. This collaborative dynamic, anchored in principles of agency in language management (Liddicoat and Taylor-Leech, 2014), positioned parents and principals as critical actors in foregrounding DLBE programs for Asian languages. Focusing on the Cantonese and Mandarin DLBE schools, the following section documents the intricate interplay between parental agency and principal agency in leadership to effect changes in their schools.

The Cantonese two-way DLBE program was founded by Principal Chan. Principal Chan had been a teacher of 16 years who recently engaged with the district’s assessment office on a special assignment. Chan was tapped in the early 2000’s by the school district in March to establish a school by August because of “an influx of kindergarten applications that year” who wanted a Chinese immersion school. She shared,

I'm sure these students had a place to go because there were probably other schools that were available. But I think they opened up the immersion school because many of the students that were applying to the existing immersion programs were not getting into them because there were only a limited number of seats.

While the school building that Principal Chan would occupy was already established, the vision and aims of the school remained undetermined. Reflecting on enrollment trends, Principal Chan asserted her agency to collaborate with district leaders “who happened to be a whole bunch of people from the bilingual department, including assistant superintendents,” to establish a new DLBE school location.

Next, Principal Chan shared that “one of the burning questions—the question of our next debate—was whether this was going to be a Mandarin program or a Cantonese program.” Exercising her agency, Chan held community listening sessions and gathered that there were “two camps.” One camp wanted children to learn Mandarin as a world language considering how useful it would be for their children in a globalized economy. The other camp wanted a Cantonese DLBE program because a majority of residents in the neighborhood were Cantonese speaking. After careful moderation and deliberation between community stakeholders, and reflection on her own background as a Cantonese-English bilingual speaker, Principal Chan and the community “landed on Cantonese because the program was supposed to be comprised of two-thirds native speakers and one-third non-native speakers, and native speakers of the city were mostly Cantonese.” The Cantonese DLBE program was thus created for heritage language speakers in the community, against the increasing popularization of Mandarin Chinese as the hegemonic and language of a global economy. Choosing to build a publicly-funded Cantonese DLBE program was not just a win for the immediate Cantonese-speaking community, but to broader Cantonese communities that have been routinely neglected and risked erasure over the last two decades in the United States (Wong & Xiao, 2010).

The Mandarin DLBE program was founded by Principal Tsai in 2010. Tsai had been a teacher and assistant principal at numerous schools before being asked by the district to serve as a principal for a non-DLBE school in a neighboring community. The school was considered a “failing” school based on student assessment data and they were faced with challenges of under enrollment. Tsai was ready for a change, transferred to this school, and spent her first year learning about the community. After attending a professional development workshop on Response to Intervention (RTI), Principal Tsai implemented RTI and saw test scores soar, elevating the reputation of the school. This, however, did not improve enrollment numbers. As a new principal, Tsai was learning about how to leverage her platform to shape the school and meet the needs of the community. She engaged in strategic conversations with school district leaders to consider options, and was told to consider pursuing a magnet or language immersion school to increase enrollment.

Simultaneously, the Confucius Institute³ at a nearby university approached Principal Tsai with an opportunity to provide free 45-min Mandarin elective classes to students in her school. Exercising her agency to incorporate these classes within the school-day schedule, she welcomed the teachers who taught Mandarin to students in her school who were predominantly African American and Latinx, and non-heritage speakers of Mandarin. The program only lasted 6 months but sparked an interest in Principal Tsai to consider how she might bring more of herself as a transnational, Mandarin-English speaker, into her work as a principal. She proudly printed a large banner to hang outside the school that stated, “Mandarin Academy.” This led to a group of Mandarin-speaking parents in the community to inquire about the program and ask if there was an established Mandarin DLBE program at the school. Although there was not a formal language immersion program at the time, the Mandarin-speaking parents shared that a large number of families would consider enrolling in her school if a formal program were established. Principal Tsai arrived at this critical juncture in the school’s history through a series of decisions influenced by her, the Confucius Institute, the parent community, and her school district leaders; yet she did not feel empowered as a principal to advocate for a language immersion program. She recalled,

From day one of me working in the school district, I was told, “Yeah, you have, you know, “A” level Mandarin [full proficiency], but that’s useless in our district.” So, I never really thought much about, you know, Mandarin or anything dual language. But the district said if you have customers, we will let you open the program, so that’s how the program officially began.

Through this interaction, we see Principal Tsai’s personal identity as a Mandarin speaker was not as influential in decision-making as the “demand” from the Mandarin-speaking parent community. This demonstrates that she could not lead from her own identity until there was a market demand—or “customers”—who would enroll in her school. Market forces thus took precedence in “allowing” Principal Tsai to shift the vision of her school. In spite of this, she opened a Mandarin DLBE kindergarten class the next academic year with 24 enrolled students.

The parent community played an instrumental role in supporting the development of the Mandarin DLBE program, and Principal Tsai exercised her agency to meaningfully engage and listen to community stakeholders to then negotiate with district leaders. For example, parents communicated to Principal Tsai that she needed to open *two* classes of Mandarin DLBE instead of just one due to the demand. Although the district would allow Tsai to do so, she transparently shared with parents that she could not hire a second teacher if enrollment did not meet the quota to publicly fund the second teacher (i.e., an additional 24 students). Returning to Taiwan for the summer break, Principal Tsai noted that “in my two and a half weeks in Asia [Taiwan], the parents got 24 other kids to come, so we

³ Confucius Institutes are public educational and cultural promotion programs affiliated with the Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China. The primary goal is to promote Chinese language and culture internationally (Confucius Institute, n.d.).

opened the program with two classes—it was amazing!” Building momentum, word spread among the broader community and there was enough demand to open four classes of students the next academic year. Principal Tsai exercised her agency to advocate to district leaders to open four classes for 96 spots. Reflecting on these initial years, Tsai said,

This really told me that, you know, this is a group of parents who are going to help build a brand-new program. And truly they did so much for the school, from starting the Booster Club, starting a newsletter, helping us celebrate the Chinese holidays, and decorating the school.

The parents also requested that the school implement a 50–50 model (instead of Mandarin elective classes offered by the Confucius Institute) where half the day is taught in Mandarin and the other half is taught in English. Trusting these community members and reflecting on her own linguistic and cultural assets as a Mandarin-English bilingual, the principal believed in this request and worked alongside her newly hired Mandarin teachers to develop curriculum unit by unit, year after year. As a principal, Tsai made decisions depending on the political conditions within the district; to parents and community members, she engaged in radical listening and transparency in her position of power; to district leaders, she communicated frequently, brought forth evidence to the parents and district personnel, and requested permission to start the Mandarin DLBE program.

Engaging through a lens of advocacy. The interviews with the three principals revealed how advocacy was a form of agency, pivotal in supporting the processes of foregrounding and engaging in social justice leadership. Although each of the three principals pursued advocacy in distinct ways, their endeavors were consistently foregrounded by the challenges, needs, experiences, and perspectives of key constituencies in dual language education.

For example, Principal Kim, a former elementary school teacher with 20 years of teaching experience, transitioned to the role of principal so she could affect more change with the agency afforded to principals. Reflecting on her motivations behind this shift, Principal Kim shared,

I realized that, you know, if you are going to make an impact, or if you want to make more of a systemic change, you have to get into more of these broader leadership positions. And so, one of my reasons to get into principalship was because I think I could influence or have more of a voice; have a seat at those tables where these decisions are being made.

Advocacy served as a catalyst for Principal Kim’s transition, fostering continuous communication with her site leadership team, including staff, teachers, and parents. This agentive decision to engage in ongoing dialogue allowed her to understand the ongoing, on-the-ground needs that were relevant to running a DLBE program more broadly and nuanced considerations specific to the Asian language DLBE context. Intimately acquainted with the concerns and needs of her constituents, Kim exercised agency by actively *engaging* with “the things that are on [her teachers’] minds—things that they are needing, issues of inequity, or

whatever the needs are,” so that she could directly translate this knowledge into advocacy efforts. Kim reflected on her influence as a principal and expressed, “those are things that I actively advocate for as a principal... at the district level” to build capacity and develop an equity-centered DLBE program.

Kim joined her school district’s cabinet as the first female Asian principal. Understanding the agentic role of her position as well as the routine neglect of the needs of Korean language teachers and students due to the district’s primary focus on English-only assumptions, she consistently interjected during curriculum instruction meetings, advocating for the inclusion of Asian languages and spotlighting the concerns of Korean teachers, repeatedly stating, “What about the Korean teachers?” This proactive engagement at the district level exemplified Principal Kim’s commitment to fostering inclusion and representation within the broader educational landscape, using her voice to stand for social justice in DLBE programs for Asian languages.

Principal Tsai also exercised the agency of her principal role by advocating for teacher pay to district leaders. Operating within the DLBE program, Principal Tsai repeatedly advocated for Mandarin teachers to be compensated for the extra work required to develop materials, assessments, and resources for the Mandarin DLBE program. While a variety of materials are offered and tailored to Spanish DLBE programs in U.S. contexts, Principal Tsai noted the challenges of developing Mandarin materials that align with standards, complement the curriculum taught in English, and adapt to the heterogeneous population of Chinese, non-Chinese, heritage and non-heritage language speakers of Mandarin. In her role of influence, she repeatedly stated, “I try to look for money [from the district] that could legally be paid to the teachers” whether it be working through grade level content, developing “some CGI [Cognitive Guided Instruction] math problems for each chapter in Mandarin,” or supporting Mandarin teachers who carry out their regular teaching duties with the added tasks of translating, creating, and adapting materials. Principal Tsai states that “the advocacy is not like advocating for advances,” but rather advocating for equitable pay that reflects the workload of her teachers; seeking social justice for the invisible work of Asian bilingual teachers in DLBE contexts.

Planning and implementing

Policy shifts and teacher skepticism challenging bilingual education implementation. The challenges of language planning relative to fluctuating policies and teachers feeling unsupported by the district are notably pronounced in the Asian language DLBE communities of this study. More specifically, the uncertainty generated by policy changes contributes to teacher skepticism as educators find it challenging to effectively plan and implement bilingual education. This difficulty is particularly pronounced among Asian language programs that lack top-down infrastructural support like human resources, material/resource availability, or professional development for teachers and leaders of Asian languages. Teachers of Asian languages expressed a lack of buy-in due to the perceived transience of

educational initiatives designed to support multilingual students. Principal Tsai captures this sentiment, stating,

But because every so often, every few years, these strategies, these road-maps change. Teachers don't buy it. They don't buy into it. They, you know, they say things like, "Well, this is just now, but it's gonna change. It's not gonna stay."

These shifting curriculum initiatives discourage principals who have to lead their teachers; as trust between teachers and the school district is broken when policies are often re-interpreted and implemented differently. These challenges are compounded when policy initiatives call for certain bilingual teaching strategies or specific bilingual pedagogical priorities that are not clearly aligned with the teaching of Asian languages, given that most bilingual education programs and policy initiatives in the United States support Spanish–English DLBE programs that consider the cross-linguistic relationships between Romanized languages; likewise, blanket policies in bilingual education often presume Spanish as the partner language for Hispanic/Latinx populations and overlook Asian populations and the unique orthographies and linguistic systems of different Asian languages. Principal Tsai shared,

So even within dual language, you know, sometimes the school district gives us strategies that are more blanket strategies. Like, "Here's your support for your language programs." But for those of us whose programs are not, you know, Spanish bilingual, it really is different. It doesn't apply the same way.

This underscores the need for tailored approaches that recognize the distinct linguistic systems within Asian language programs.

Moreover, the burden of responsibility for immersion in the non-English partner language falls disproportionately on teachers in Asian language programs, as noted by Principal Kim,

We have a majority of non-heritage students... We are predominantly non-Korean heritage students. So, we, as teachers, have to assume the responsibility of truly immersing those students. Everything is really taught in the classroom in those four walls because at home and in the community, there's no Korean anywhere else... so we have to take a lot more ownership and responsibility.

This disparity further compounds the challenges faced by principals and teachers in Asian language programs, diminishing agency and motivation in the face of evolving policies and insufficient district support. This is particularly important in DLBE programs for native and heritage language speakers—like the Mandarin and Cantonese DLBE schools in this study, which in turn thwart opportunities to promote social justice.

Inadequate Resources Increasing the Burden on Teachers of Asian Languages. One of the most significant challenges hindering the planning and implementation of social justice-oriented Asian language DLBE programs was inadequate

resources. Principals from each school focused a lot of our discussions on the burden taken on by teachers to create materials and resources for effective teaching in Mandarin, Cantonese, and Korean, exercising agency to support teachers with material development and navigating the unique populations of students in their DLBE contexts.

Principal Chan clearly articulates the struggle in an immersion program where teachers cover content subjects in both languages. The lack of existing materials necessitates teachers to create everything from reading materials, to teaching materials, to assessment materials. Leading a Cantonese DLBE school, Principal Chan states, “But in Chinese, none of that exists. So, our teachers have to go through the hard work of creating their own *everything!*” This includes materials for not just their Asian language arts classes, but for mathematics, science, and social studies in the elementary grade levels. Chan said, exasperated, “It’s a huge deficit! And it makes the teachers work a lot harder, a lot heavier!” The burden placed on teachers to create materials and resources impedes seamless planning and implementation processes.

The Korean DLBE program in this study faced a similar challenge, where the principal was trying to help teachers piece together materials for language development in math and science. Taking a macro-curricular perspective, Principal Kim states,

So, when we started looking for materials for Korean, we’re using this for Korean language development, using this for math. We’re using this for science. Some of them are translated and adapted from our non-DLBE curriculum, and some of them we’ve borrowed from Korea or from other materials. So, we’re kind of piecing things together and don’t have any assessments that are ready to use, so there’s a lack of a cohesive curriculum.

Principal Kim felt like they were always playing catch up to meet the content and language learning requirements for students in each new grade, asserting her agency as a school leader to support teachers amid the constraining circumstances.

Principal Chan of the Cantonese DLBE program echoed these sentiments, noting the added challenge of teaching a non-dominant variety of Chinese that has even fewer resources than those offered in Mandarin DLBE programs. She provided a detailed example of interactive read-alouds with children where teachers needed to make moment-by-moment translations of words written in print when spoken in Cantonese (e.g., saying “係” (to be) instead of “是” which is written in print), and children need to become aware of the metalinguistic connections between Cantonese oral and written language. Fully aware of the constraints in her district, Principal Chan said that “teachers spend a lot of time creating books even though we have books; they are just not adapted to the Cantonese language.”

Further impacting the contexts in which principals make agentive decisions was the insurmountable challenge of hiring, supporting, and retaining qualified and credentialed teachers in DLBE schools for Asian languages. Principal Tsai shared,

Now, Mandarin, it’s even harder because most of our teachers are teachers who went to university in China or Taiwan and then they came to the U.S. to study

for a credential and then became teachers in the U.S. So, for these people, it's harder and harder to find because for years the U.S. government did not allow student visas to Chinese students from China...

While an increasing number of bilingually authorized candidates are coming through the teacher education pipeline in California, with initiatives to diversify the teacher workforce, many U.S.-raised Asian Americans have strong oral language skills in their heritage language but are unable to meet the literacy demands of teacher assessments required for bilingual licensure.

Relatedly, principals were constantly burdened with the shortage of Asian language substitute teachers to effectively implement their Asian language DLBE programs. Principal Tsai shared that in the previous year, five Mandarin teachers went out on maternity leave. Although the district said they would let her know if any Mandarin teachers became available, the principal rhetorically asked, "Guess how many Mandarin substitute teachers the district has? Zero." Principal Tsai understood that the district was trying to help, but fully recognized she was unable to lead a consistent, high quality Mandarin DLBE program if she did not have access to Mandarin teachers to teach and support their mission for an equitable education for native, heritage and non-heritage speaking students of Mandarin.

The findings reveal structural challenges in planning and implementing DLBE programs, particularly in Asian languages, due to volatile policies and insufficient district support. Policy fluctuations contribute towards teacher skepticism and a lack of sustained implementation strategies, which are exacerbated in Asian language DLBE programs due to a lack of human and material resources. These programs face unique challenges that principals need to strategically navigate, including the need for tailored and contextualized teaching materials and curricula that accommodate the linguistic systems of less commonly taught languages, placing a significant burden on teachers. Additionally, principals had to lead DLBE programs within the reality of scarce qualified teachers and resources, impacting their ability to lead effective and enduring DLBE initiatives.

Evaluating and sustaining

Lack of tailored top-down support to sustain the program. As the principals reflected on their ability to evaluate and sustain DLBE programs while navigating shifting language-in-education policies, they all noted the lack of tailored top-down (e.g., district) support for continuous program improvement, including curriculum and materials, quality in bilingual instruction, and teacher professional development.

Principal Kim discussed how for her growing team, Korean teachers' specific professional development needs were not met even though there was an abundance of professional development opportunities furnished by the district:

Our district provides professional development (PD) opportunities. For example, we have a whole learning stream platform that has all these different PDs for all of our staff, all of our teachers across the district, and we have, you know, thousands of teachers. Yet when I look there, there is

maybe one that was allowed or applicable for my Korean teachers and our team is growing now... So, I was asking the director about it. You know, how can we not have any more opportunities for them? Their needs are not met. That's not equitable.

This once more reflects the inequitable distribution of resources across different languages at the upper level, which further affected principal Kim's capacity to expand and sustain the Korean-English DLBE program. While Principal Kim continued to engage in advocacy efforts and voice her concerns, she described such acts as a "delicate dance," which required cautious and careful maneuvering especially as an Asian woman of color in the United States. Although persistent in exercising her agency to voice concerns, Kim said "always speaking up" might be seen as a "squeaky wheel in the higher ups' eyes." She elaborates:

So, as I'm voicing some of these concerns... I am being a little bit challenged by directors and higher ups... sometimes I think I try to balance what I say, how often I say things, because after a while I sound like a squeaky wheel, I'm sure, in their eyes. So always speaking up sometimes at a district level when you're just the principal can sometimes be viewed not in a super positive way.

Principal Kim illuminates the delicate balancing game of identifying program needs and anticipating resistance from senior administrators, contributing to her relative erasure as an Asian, female leader.

In addition, Principal Tsai mentioned that the district should provide systematic support for teacher hiring and curriculum/material development to maintain and sustain the rigor and quality of Asian language DLBE programs moving forward:

So, for hiring, curriculum, they [the district] need to [provide support]. Otherwise, it's not gonna happen if you're gonna have, you know, a district full of watered-down programs that are not really doing a great job ... We shouldn't do anything haphazard, you know.

Principal Tsai's warning of watered-down programs raises an important concern regarding her role and agency as a principal, trying to deliver a high quality DLBE program when the district does not consider carefully to provide the matching infrastructure support. She further adds that, "They [the district] are opening new dual language programs every year ... I know they know how to open programs, but what I hope for is that they will do the footwork to actually support the program." In other words, while policy initiatives like the Global California 2030 might accelerate the establishment of DLBE programs across the district, Principal Tsai points out that quantity should not be at the expense of a quality, well-supported program.

The principals, as meso-level actors, find themselves in a precarious position where they have to interpret shifting district policies and simultaneously argue for the unmet needs of their programs, teachers, students and families. This intermediary role often places them at odds with higher-level districts that challenge their ability to effectively enact social justice leadership. Despite their champion efforts to advocate for equitable support and resources, the lack of infrastructural support at

the district not only stifles their leadership moves but also compromises the sustainability of their DLBE programs.

Discussion and conclusion

This study examined how three champion principals of Asian language DLBE programs—Cantonese, Korean, and Mandarin—in California have navigated the oscillating language-in-education policies after the *Lau* decision to support the growth and sustainability of their programs. We explored their various roles through a lens of agency within a social justice leadership framework for dual language principals (DeMatthews & Izquierdo, 2018), specifically considering the opportunities and challenges for agentive leadership from three different phases: *foregrounding and engaging, planning and implementing, and evaluating and sustaining*.

Overall, all three principals expertly enacted DLBE principalship skills and traits that the extant literature suggests are best practices (Hunt, 2011; Marzano et al., 2005; Rocque et al., 2016), such as having an unwavering commitment to bilingualism and multiculturalism, possessing specialized knowledge of the partner language and culture, streamlined communication and shared leadership with staff, collaboration with parents, and hands-on involvement with curriculum, instruction and assessment. In addition, the three principals played multiple essential roles during different phases, demonstrating knowledge of DLBE research (immersion guru), performing agentive moves to strategically interpret and navigate policy changes (immersion overseer) while grounding themselves in their local communities to advocate for the specific needs of the teachers, students, and parents (immersion proponent and agent of change) (Rocque et al., 2016).

Yet each of their paths to establishing and building their DLBE programs was replete with uncertainties and challenges—one step forward, two steps back against the complex, politicized bilingual education landscape in California. One key challenge is that blanket policies in bilingual education at the upper level often support bilingual education more broadly but overlook Asian languages and the unique needs of Asian teachers and communities in DLBE schools, and it being ascribed as the sole responsibility of the principal to mitigate. This may limit principals' efforts to initiate equity- and social justice-oriented changes. Therefore, we urge policymakers and administrators at the district and state levels to formulate comprehensive and tailored policies and activities that offer tangible implications to bolster principals' advocacy and ability to champion for social justice. These policy implications include resource allocation to promote teacher recruitment and hiring of Asian language teachers and Asian language substitute teachers, vocalized as a dire need by all three principals interviewed. The need for resource allocation was initially conceptualized in "The Master Plan for Bilingual and Bicultural Education in San Francisco Unified School District" (Center for Applied Linguistics & Citizens' Task Force on Bilingual Education, 1975) in direct response to the *Lau* decision, including additional compensation and the hiring of curriculum writers. Yet, 50 years later the recommendations from this blueprint document remain unrealized. Resources could also be allocated to improving teacher compensation mechanisms to formally

recognize and honor the additional work that bilingual teachers do to translate instructional and assessment materials, plan curriculum that bridge content between languages, and engage in family and community involvement, while teaching double the number of students in a dual language model as they swap classrooms with the other language teacher. Resource allocation is a tangible policy implication that empowers principals as meso-level actors to engage in program sustainability as they have the needed resources to foster an equitable work environment for teachers and a rich multilingual learning environment for all children. Further investigation is needed to understand how to recognize and support meso-level actors for resilience so they can serve as intermediary interpreters of macro-level policies that impact micro-level actors (e.g., teachers, parents, students).

Another critical policy implication stemming from the interviews in this study is a glaring need for professional development opportunities for teachers, staff, and community members. Now 50 years after the *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) case, which states that “the district must take affirmative steps to rectify the language deficiency⁴ in order to open its instructional program” to promote multilingual students’ “effective participation in the educational program offered by a school district,” teachers of Asian language DLBE programs are wrestling with bilingual instruction, biliteracy development, and multilingual assessments in language arts, content areas, and upper grade learning contexts. Assuming responsibility to move the needle towards the goals of the Global California 2030 initiative, districts might initiate professional development that fosters communities of practice across and among Asian language DLBE schools to promote synergies that propel the field forward. Rather than operating in isolation and “reinventing the wheel” to address challenges in Asian language DLBE programs, there is potential to *collectively* ensure through professional development that every student in Asian language DLBE programs can “effectively participate” in the educational programming offered by the school district. Relatedly, beyond considering support for school-based material development, interviews from principals indicated a clear need for materials to be systematically developed and shared across schools, reflecting the unique populations of Asian and Asian American students who require scaffolded language instruction in language and content area courses, which is sequenced and spiraled from the earliest years of kindergarten all the way up to high school.

Furthermore, formal and informal spaces should be created and sustained (e.g., hearings, town hall meetings, and other innovative platforms) to facilitate critical dialogues with people at the meso and micro-levels (e.g., principals, teachers and parents) where the important topics mentioned above can be discussed. For example, districts could create digital platforms for ongoing engagement among key stakeholders, fostering an online community where principals, teachers, parents, and even students can share experiences, resources, challenges, and best practices.

⁴ The term “language deficiency” was used in the context of policy in 1974; today, we advocate for terminology that recognizes the linguistic and cultural assets of multilingual students. In current discourse and context, we recommend replacing “rectify the language deficiency” with “expand the multilingual repertoires.”

Digital platforms can increase engagement by making it accessible to more stakeholders, and allowing continuous, asynchronous dialogue to capture needs and challenges from voices that are underrepresented at in-person events. This democratized virtual approach has potential to enhance transparency and cultivate trusting relationships among the different parties involved. A second implication might involve community-based participatory research (Duke, 2020) initiatives funded by districts to engage stakeholders in research that addresses challenges, disseminates findings and best practices, and informs future policies with evidence that is contextualized to the specific beneficiaries of school communities. Community-based participatory research would also foster a sense of ownership among stakeholders to directly generate knowledge that informs policy and practice.

To conclude, the *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) case was a landmark decision that advocated for linguistic rights and laid the groundwork for an equitable education in the U.S. by way of a bilingual education. This decision spurred legislative efforts that catalyzed the growth of DLBE programs across the nation, with unprecedented expansion in key states including California. Although state-level language-in-education policies in California resulted in oscillating shifts that were both negative (i.e., Proposition 227) and an attempt as being restorative (i.e., Proposition 58), the enduring impact of the *Lau* decision on bilingual education for Asian languages has been equally tumultuous. Findings demonstrate that the success of DLBE programs goes beyond overarching language policies. Rather, success hinges on the commitment and resilience of those at the forefront: principals, teachers, and parent communities. By particularly elevating three champion principals and their experiences, this study contributes valuable insights to inform future implementational research, practice and policy, ensuring the continued development and sustainable support of Asian language bilingual education for the linguistically, culturally, and racially diverse communities represented in this country.

Appendix 1 Interview questions

Policy-related questions

Lau vs. Nichols (1974) was a Supreme Court case 50 years ago that enabled bilingual education at a federal level under the premise that schools “must be designed to meet [students’] language needs as soon as possible and must not operate as an educational deadend”. To what extent do you believe this policy goal has been realized [in your school / and broadly speaking]? Why/why not?

Original quotes from *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) to support follow up semi-structured discussion:

“Where inability to speak and understand the English language excludes national origin-minority group children from effective participation in the educational program offered by a school district, the district must take affirmative steps to

rectify the language deficiency in order to open its instructional program to these students.”

“Any ability grouping or tracking system employed by the school system to deal with the special language skill needs of national origin-minority group children must be designed to meet such language skill needs as soon as possible and must not operate as an educational deadend or permanent track.”

History of principalship

1. Tell us how long have you been in this role (principal) in this program?
2. What has been your journey to becoming a principal of this DLBE school?
3. What have been some defining moments/milestones during your principalship?
4. How have you leveraged your platform as a principal to “champion” for bilingual education of [Asian] language? (e.g., how have you engaged in advocacy efforts?)

History of their bilingual education program:

1. Tell us about the history of the bilingual education program at your school?
2. How has your bilingual program responded to the shifts in (bilingual education) policy documents and legislature?
3. What have been the main successes & challenges in promoting the [Asian] language in your school context?
4. How has your bilingual program responded to the shifting demographics in your school context?
5. In what ways does your school or program serve the Asian community?
6. In what ways has the school supported or come alongside advocacy efforts from the Asian community?

Current/future program designs

1. What is your current program design/model for your [Asian language] school?
2. Please tell us your experience of implementing your current model/design, like what have been challenges for you and what successes have you achieved?
3. In what ways has this model/design changed since you started the program? What informed your decisions to make those changes? How have you come to make those decisions?
4. How has past and current language policies (provide some examples of policies) influenced your program design?
5. How does this model fit or not fit with certain students’ needs?
6. What is your vision for the program moving forward?

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