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A. QUALITY OF THE PROJECT DESIGN

The University of Maryland (UMD), in partnership with Learning Forward, the Center for Teaching Quality (CTQ), and Policy Studies Associates, submits this application to the Supporting Effective Educator Development (SEED) program proposing leadership development and support for 180 school district leaders in Maryland, New Jersey, and Delaware. **The School Improvement Leadership Academy (SILA)** proposal addresses the **SEED Absolute Priority 2**: *Supporting Effective Principals or Other School Leaders*. In addition, this proposal addresses **Competitive Preference Priority 1** (*Increasing Educator Diversity)*; **Competitive Preference Priority 2** (*Promoting Equity in Student Access to Educational Resources and Opportunities*) and **Competitive Preference Priority 3** (*Meeting Student Social, Emotional, and Academic Needs*).

SILA will support principal recruitment and principal development by providing comprehensive, evidence-based professional learning to assistant principals (APs) and principals in Title I schools, Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI) schools, and/or high need schools. SILA will focus on increasing educator diversity by recruiting a diverse pool of APs for participation and enhancing principal capacity to recruit and retain more diverse teachers. Through project participation, principals and APs will have an opportunity to achieve micro-credentials and UMD graduate credit in the following areas: **Improvement Leadership**, focused on driving continuous improvement through the design, implementation, and scaling of evidence-based academic interventions; **Equity Leadership**, focused on fostering a supportive and inclusive learning environment for all students as well as attending to students' social, emotional development; **Instructional Leadership**, focused on advancing students' academic development through promoting literacy and numeracy achievement. These credentials will be

earned through a rigorous 2-year academy model designed to accelerate school leaders' capacity through developing a more advanced skill set in promoting continuous improvement and fostering conditions of greater equity for diverse learners.

The SILA project represents an exceptional approach to the priorities of the SEED grant and in particular those of supporting effective principals and APs. This project addresses all three of the elements of the principal effectiveness priority. First, the project provides a non-traditional pathway to principal leadership in high-needs schools by supporting and preparing a diverse pool of APs to become effective principals. Recent research suggests the often overlooked value of the assistant principalship and the critical need to support their development (Goldring, et al., 2021). While most APs already have a principal certification by the state, there are few supports offered by districts or universities targeted explicitly to the development needs and preparation of APs (Oleszewski et al., 2012). Second, the project provides evidence-based professional learning activities that address numeracy, literacy, social and emotional learning, inclusion, school climate, and systemic improvement (Carlson et al., 2011; Jacob et al., 2015; Nunnery et al., 2011). Supporting principals and APs in learning to address these critical areas of leadership has been found to be essential to linking their leadership with student outcomes (Grissom, Egalite, & Lindsay, 2021). Finally, the project provides professional enhancement and professional credentials with participants gaining up to six micro-credentials and six UMD graduate credits.

(1) The services are of sufficient quality, intensity, and duration.

The SILA Project will provide comprehensive and evidence-based professional learning services that will increase school leader capacity, improve school leader practice, and improve student outcomes in schools led by program participants. The SILA will recruit 140 principals

and 40 APs from over 30 school districts in three mid-Atlantic states: Maryland, New Jersey, and Delaware. Participants will engage in two years of academy activity that will include individual and peer learning opportunities; mentoring and coaching by expert facilitators; implementation of improvement strategies and evidence-based interventions to address problems of practice identified at each individual school. At the end of the three-year intervention, the Academy will conclude with a final Summer Institute wherein all participating principals and APs will have an opportunity to present the results from their continuous improvement efforts and to share what they've learned about effective equity leadership.

Quality of Program Standards. The SILA program is firmly embedded in accepted standards of practice. The Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) are the prominent leadership standards in Maryland, New Jersey, and Delaware. The PSEL, grounded in research and educator practice, delineates the core skills, knowledge, and practices which will become the measure of principals' development in the SILA program design. In particular, the SILA program will focus on five PSEL standards that undergird our leadership development strategy: PSEL Standard 3: *Equity and Cultural Responsiveness;* Standard 6: *Professional Capacity of School Personnel*; PSEL Standard 10: *School Improvement.*

Quality of Program Design. The SILA three-year project model serves two cohorts of 90 participants: 70 principals and 20 APs in each cohort. Each cohort will participate in two years of academy programming as described below. In year three, all 180 school leaders will participate in a concluding Summer Institute.

District and School Selection Process. UMD has invited 40 school districts from across the state of Maryland, New Jersey and Delaware to participate. Across these districts, there are well over 500 schools that have been identified as TSI schools and hundreds more that are Title I

schools. If funded, the project will sign formal agreements with all school districts and implement a process for selecting the 140 schools to participate. Selection criteria will be based on: a) ensuring geographic diversity; b) Title I or other high needs school designation[1]; c) TSI schools that have significant teacher diversity gaps. Seventy schools will be selected for participation in each of the first two years. In 50 schools, the principal will be the sole participant, and in 20 schools, both the principal and one AP will participate.

Given the diversity demographics of schools in each state, the project team will also work with participating districts to select a cadre of leaders who represent and can increase the diversity of the educator workforce in the region. Diversifying the workforce, developing leaders, addressing gaps in equity are consistent themes across state lines. By leveraging these existing partnerships with districts, we can better capitalize on learning through these various perspectives while working collaboratively to both learn and problem solve together. This will be critical, given recent research that suggests the importance of the role of the principal in diversifying the teachers they hire, as well as diversifying the pool of principals themselves (Grissom et al., 2021). In addition to actively recruiting a cohort of Academy participants who can help diversify their districts' leadership pipelines, we will also be selecting leaders who are actively engaged in school improvement planning.   A selection process for APs will be developed to ensure a representative sample of schools based on geography and school type (as outlined above), as well as demographic diversity. The project has already secured support from several districts in Maryland, New Jersey, and Delaware as demonstrated in the Letters of Support (see Appendices D).

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[1] A high needs school is defined as a school with a 1,2 or 3-star rating on the state's school accountability metrics

A selection process for assistant principals will be developed to ensure a relatively representative sample of schools based on geography and school type (as outlined above). Table 1 outlines the project participation structure.

Table 1: Cohort Selection

YEAR ONE	YEAR TWO	YEAR THREE
Cohort 1 in Academy I 70 cohort 1 schools 70 cohort 1 principals 20 cohort 1 assistant principals	*Cohort 2 in Academy I* 70 cohort 2 schools 70 cohort 2 principals 20 cohort 2 assistant principals *Cohort 1 in Academy II* 70 cohort 1 principals 20 cohort 1 assistant principals	*Cohort 2 in Academy II* 70 principals 20 assistant principals *Cohort 1 & 2 in Academy III* 180 principals and assistant principals in concluding Summer Institute

Academy I - Becoming a School Improvement Leader. The goal of Academy I is to significantly increase the skills and capacities of school leaders through evidence-based and comprehensive professional learning activities delivered during the first year of participation. Activities will consist of three online synchronous full-day seminars; monthly online content webinars; individualized improvement planning activities between seminars; and a three-day summer institute. All learning sessions will be facilitated by UMD faculty, Learning Forward staff, and other content experts. The three leadership strands will be interwoven throughout all activities as outlined in Table 2.

Table 2: Leadership Academy Strands

Leadership Strand	Topics Covered	Credentials
Instructional Leadership (PSELs 4, 6, 10)	● Evidence-based interventions in literacy and numeracy ● Effective feedback to teachers and staff ● Leading "Standards-Based" Professional Learning ● Establishing a community of learners	1-2 Micro-credentials

Equity Leadership (PSELs 3,5)	• Culturally Responsive Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) • Equity Audits • Anti-biased teaching • Restorative Justice • Trauma and healing-focused schools • Inclusive School Climate • Recruiting and retaining a diverse staff	2 Micro-credentials 3 UMD Credit Seminar in Equity Leadership
Improvement Leadership (PSELs 10)	• Root Cause Analysis • Empathy Interviews • Evidence based strategy selection • Process Measurement • Short Cycle academic intervention testing	2 Micro-credentials 3 UMD Credit Seminar in Improvement Leadership

Instructional Leadership. Singular school variables, considered separately, have at most small effects on learning (Wallace, 2013). The goal of the instructional leadership strand is to support principals and APs in honing their instructional leadership skills to "reach that critical mass" to support the learning of both the students and teachers in their schools. In particular, the work will focus on the role of the principal and AP in building the professional community among teachers and developing systems of professional learning aligned to the Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2022).

In building instructional leadership capacity, effective leaders hold learning among their top priorities for students, staff, and themselves. They recognize that universal high expectations for all students require ambitious improvements in curriculum, instruction, assessment, leadership practices, support, and coherence among these elements (e.g. Leithwood, et al., 2004; Grissom et al., 2021; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Hallinger & Leithwood, 1994; Neumerski, 2013). These changes require effective leadership professional learning opportunities to expand educators' knowledge, skills, practices, and dispositions. In creating support systems and structures, effective leaders establish organizational systems which support effective professional development and ongoing continuous improvement.

Equity Leadership. Professional Standard for Educational Leaders #3 states, "Effective educational leaders strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practice to promote each student's academic success and well-being" (NPBEA, 2015). The goal of the leadership strand of equity leadership is to empower and equip principals and APs to promote culturally responsive socioemotional learning practices and policies in their schools (addressing Competitive Preference Priority 3). Moreover, equity is woven into socioemotional practices and policies with an overarching goal of eliminating disproportional discipline and special education referrals. By taking a culturally responsive stance (Gay, 2000), schools may be more likely to achieve their long-term goals of making school more engaging, with positive consequences for discipline and achievement across a diverse community of students (Howard & Terry, 2011). The content of the micro-credentials and course credits will focus explicitly on Increasing Educator Diversity *(Competitive Preference Priority 1)* and Promoting Equity in Student Access to Educational Resources and Opportunities (*Competitive Preference Priority 2*).

Given racial disparities in U.S. school disciplinary practices (Losen et al., 2015), another goal is to empower principals in reducing discipline disproportionality. To this end, principals and APs will be exposed to and role play restorative justice practices (Gregory et al., 2016). Restorative practices include the socioemotional skills of empathy and assertiveness, repair of harm and reintegration, and building strong support networks, with the goal of multi-level, whole-school change (Hopkins, 2017). Additionally, trauma and healing-informed schools will be addressed via discussions of underlying theory, research, and methods (Chafouleas, et al, 2016). Healing-informed school practices have recently been promoted as a way to decrease disproportionate discipline, especially to ensure equity in school discipline, trust, and quality

relationships with African American students (Morris, 2019). These Equity Leadership modules are designed to address Critical Priorities #2 and #3.

Improvement Leadership. In the face of deep-seated problems of educational inequity that have only deepened during the pandemic, school leaders require advanced skill sets to analyze situations, advance solutions, and create new tools and processes that advance more equitable student outcomes. The goal of the leadership strand of systemic leadership is to increase the capacity of principals to engage in disciplined inquiry that uses data, evidence, experience, and context to design, develop, and/or scale improvement strategies and practices. Improvement leadership aims towards more equitably distributed resources, staff, and programs to accomplish school goals, such as is the emphasis of Critical Priority #2 (Valdez et al, 2020; Foster, E. 2022).

Improvement science is a set of principles and tools centered on helping schools improve faster and more strategically. The six principles of improvement developed by Bryk et al (2015) will be a guiding framework for the improvement leadership curriculum. These principles will be coupled with the use of improvement tools and processes such as empathy interviews, causal systems analysis, and short-cycle improvement planning that can be directly applied to helping principals meet the student outcomes goals of their school improvement plans. The Improvement modules and all related activities will be aligned to the indicators in PSEL 10.

Academy II: Putting School Improvement Leadership into Practice. The second year of SILA has two primary objectives: 1) to support principals in applying improvement principles and implementing evidence-based strategies in their school improvement plans; and 2) to support APs in applying improvement principles and engaging in other leadership activities that will prepare them to become effective principals. SILA will support principals through an executive

coaching program and will support APs through an AP Fellowship program. The approach in SILA is to follow the first year of intensive learning and skill development organized around the three curriculum strands with a year of leadership practice supported by coaching and technical assistance to support continuous improvement.

Principal Coaching. The importance of coaching to build leader capacity is a longstanding practice that has proven to strengthen leader efficacy. Research has shown that coaching as a significant means of professional learning directly impacts instructional leadership (Dewitt, 2021). There are three coaching lenses that influence the approach to coaching and supporting school leaders in their improvement efforts: equity, adult learning theory, and systems thinking. Equity is a lens through which coaches approach process and product. Adult learning theory guides this work by ensuring that the best approaches for leader development are essential in informing sustained change for model participants. Systems thinking is necessary to move and change complex interactions such as school improvement, and an understanding of system structures allows us to identify possible leverage points.

This project will have a total of fourteen coaches where each coach will work directly with five principals in both small cohorts and individually around how the problems of practice studied in year one are being addressed through the school improvement planning process in year two. The problems of practice will center on one or more of the three core areas (as outlined in the Competitive Preference Priorities): 1. Increasing educator diversity; 2. Promoting equity in student access to educational resources and opportunities; 3: meeting student social, emotional, and academic needs. Coaches will conduct monthly virtual coaching sessions and will conduct two in-person coaching sessions per year at the school site. During regular touchpoints, coaches and school leaders may also review and assess new data and plan activities in the continuous

loop of school improvement. Coaches will continuously monitor participants' progress toward achieving goals they have set for themselves, offer feedback, and celebrate progress.

The AP Fellowship. The Principal Pipeline Initiative (PPI), sponsored by The Wallace Foundation and implemented in six large districts has shown the feasibility—and the effects on student achievement—of a strategic approach to developing and supporting school leaders with standards-aligned preparation, placement, evaluation, and support (Gates et al., 2019; Turnbull et al., 2016; Turnbull, Worley & Palmer, 2021). It is clear the AP role, which in many cases serves as the primary bench to the principalship, requires specific attention (Goldring, et al., 2021). Over the 12-month period, the AP Fellow will learn in/through three specific contexts: 1) monthly facilitated "Fellow Up Sessions" meetings; 2) championing improvement science and equity as "Equity Ambassador"; and 3) daily work as a practicing administrator with alignment to the PSEL. The process for selection also affords districts to be intentional and thoughtful about their goal for diversifying the workforce.

The monthly "Fellow Up" session meeting will be co-led and facilitated by mentor principals and UMD faculty. Each month, the Fellows will participate in a topical discussion that examines one or more of the PSEL standards in practice. The Equity Ambassador role helps the AP Fellow take a deep dive examination of school improvement while also providing space to practice, test, and infuse the Improvement Science principles at the Fellow's school. As a part of their daily practice, Fellows will be expected to integrate, incorporate, and champion the work of Improvement Science by exploring their schools' identified problems of practice and conducting improvement cycles with staff, as well as leading external partner engagement around improvement with parents and other stakeholder groups throughout the year. The Fellow will maintain a record of all of their experiences to create an AP Fellowship Leadership Journey

document. That Leadership Journey will serve as one of the culminating activities that captures the Fellow's learning along the PSEL continuum, through the Improvement Ambassador role and their daily examination of their own practice throughout this 12-month experience.

Academy principals, APs, improvement coaches, and Fellowship facilitators will also convene quarterly in Year 2 (virtually) as an improvement community to review data together, to reflect on their challenges with regards to their improvement planning, and to learn what's working to get improved results and why.

Academy III: Spreading and Scaling Expertise. Academy III has two primary objectives: 1) to build and strengthen a network of School Improvement Leaders so that their improvement leadership practices can be sustained beyond the grant; 2) to share the results and improvement of the participating school leaders such that others can learn from and even emulate their equity-driven approach to school improvement planning.

School Improvement Leaders Network. During the third year of the project, SILA will continue to engage the principals and APs from Cohort 1 who have completed Academy I and Academy II. Cohort 1 school leaders will participate in quarterly networking and affinity group sessions facilitated by SILA faculty and partners. This is an important element of program design given that participants are spread across over 30+ districts in three states, and it is likely that some may be the only (or one of few) representatives of their district.

Culminating Summer Institute. In the summer of 2025, SILA will hold the culminating Summer Institute with all 180 principals and APs from both cohorts and principal supervisors who have participated in prior summer institutes. In addition, school superintendents, university faculty, and other content experts will be invited. The Institute will be organized by the leadership strands and provide opportunities for principals to share the improvement work they

engaged in as a result of the program and the impacts on student achievement. Poster sessions will allow for every participant to share their results, and spotlight sessions will focus on schools that made remarkable progress. Panels of superintendents and principal supervisors will center on how the project had impact beyond the walls of the particular schools involved and how the work can be sustained and scaled. Institute presentations and sessions will be documented and will be an important element of project documentation.

(2) Builds capacity and yields results that will extend beyond the period of Federal financial assistance.

There are several elements of the program design that support ongoing work and sustainability. For UMD, the development of a core set of School Improvement micro-modules and micro-credentials will allow the university and the Center for Educational Innovation and Improvement to engage with school leaders in the partner districts who did not participate in the Academy and yet are seeking a way to develop their skills as equity and improvement leaders. The development of these online learning modules in *OpenLearning* will significantly increase capacity to spread and scale effective professional learning across the region for principals and APs who would benefit from both the content of the Equity and Improvement Leadership strands and the opportunity to demonstrate the application of their skills in these critical leadership domains (PSELs #3 and #10).

The program also will support ongoing work and sustainability at the district, school, and school leader level. As detailed previously, a primary objective of Academy III (third year of the grant) is to plan for sustainability and scale. By preparing APs who will become effective principals, and providing principals with a forum to mentor and network with other leaders across the region, the project sets the foundation for sustaining the change process and for making the work of school improvement leadership the core work of the school principal.

(3) Conceptual framework underlying the proposed research or demonstration activities.

Theory of Action. The core Theory of Action is embedded in our proposition that instructional leadership is necessary but insufficient for school principals and APs to significantly advance student achievement among high need student populations. Becoming a School Improvement Leader requires a broader set of skills, competencies, and practices that both improve the quality of instruction and improve school structures, systems, and culture aimed at achieving better and more equitable outcomes for students. *If* principals and APs combine strong instructional leadership with increased capacity in equity and improvement leadership, *then* they will be better equipped to successfully design, implement, and scale effective strategies *and* meet the student achievement and equity goals set by schools and districts. The SILA logic model (Figure 1) outlines the inputs, strategies, and outputs that the project will implement and the short and long term outcomes the project aims to achieve.

Figure 1: SILA Logic Model

Inputs	Strategy	Outputs	Short-term Outcomes	Long-term Outcomes/Impacts
Tangible resources: Grant funding for professional learning (trainings, webinars, coaching, etc.) Data Collection & Survey Instrumentation and Analysis UMD Open Learning Platform SILA School Improvement Planning Handbook Intangible resources: Schools Districts' Commitment Faculty and Partner Expertise Peer Learning	1st year SILA (All) • Quarterly learning convenings • Monthly webinars • 3-day Summer Institute 2nd yr SILA (Principals) • Individualized Coaching • Monthly Affinity Improvement Network 2nd yr SILA (APs) • Monthly NIC Fellowship • School-embedded Coaching 3rd yr Summer Institute Conference (All)	Graduate credits earned Micro-credentials awarded	Improved knowledge and skill in three core leadership areas Improved collaboration through networking Improved quality of school-based improvement plans	Improved Leadership Practices Increased Principal Retention Assistant Principals Promotion Diversification of Educator Workforce Measurable progress toward student achievement and school climate goals of School Improvement Plan (math and ELA, SEL) Decrease in chronic absenteeism and disciplinary referrals

The Evidence Base. The SILA program design is supported by two anchor studies that meet the Promising Evidence standard for the What Works Clearinghouse (Carlson, et al., 2011;

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Nunnery, et al., 2011). Additionally, every dimension of the program's model is supported by a large and growing body of research on professional learning, school leadership, principal preparation, and continuous improvement (Goldring et al., 2021; Grissom et al., 2021; Turnbull et al., 2021). Unfortunately, there is not yet a robust body of evidence-based research on principal professional learning that meets the highest level of evidence of impact on student learning. However, the anchor studies combined with a broader array of quality research in both practice and theory provide a strong grounding for the SILA professional learning and preparation model. Please see Table 3 below for a summary of the contributing research evidence base which serves as the foundation for this intervention design.

Nunnery et al (2011) studied the impact of the National Institute for School Leadership (NISL) Executive Development Program for principals. The study examines the effect of school leader participation in the program on student outcomes in reading and mathematics in comparison to control schools in the same state with principals who did not participate in this leadership intervention. The researchers reported that there were significant advantages for the NISL schools in terms of mathematics, but no effect for reading. These findings of this longitudinal study met the WWC threshold for moderate evidence with reservations.

The UMD School Improvement Leadership Academy is similar to the NISL program in terms of content, rigor, and intensity. The relevant student outcome for the NISL study was student achievement in mathematics, which is also one of the key outcomes included in the logic model for our proposed intervention. The population and settings also overlap with the Nunnery study and our proposed professional learning program in terms of the selection/sampling focus on elementary and middle schools. Given the comparative rigor and intensity of our proposed Leadership Academy, we hypothesize that our approach to in-service professional learning for

principals and APs will also positively impact student achievement outcomes across participating schools, as designated in their School Improvement Plans.

While our proposed intervention appears to emulate the multi-faceted design of the NISL Executive Leadership program, our special attention to the importance of school improvement planning as a core skill set of effective leadership aligns with the emphasis and findings of another exemplary study by Carlson et al (2011). The Center for Data-Driven Education Reform (CDDER) at Johns Hopkins provided the participating school leaders with extensive training on interpreting and using data to guide their improvement efforts. The What Works Clearinghouse determined that the Tier 1 Carlson study meets the federal standards for strong evidence without reservation. Carlson and his team of researchers concluded that the CDDRE intervention caused statistically significant improvements in mathematics achievement and had a positive effect on reading achievement across the districts that participated in the study. Our proposed model of support for developing school leaders' systemic planning skills aligns closely with the CDDRE intervention in terms of the incorporation of the tools and resources of improvement science as a framework for reform.

More recently, Grissom, Egalite, and Lindsay (2021) synthesized two decades of research and concluded that the role of the principal in impacting student achievement has been *underestimated,* and that, in fact, the impact of an effective principal on student achievement is nearly as large as having an effective teacher. They call for "renewed attention to strategies for cultivating, selecting, preparing, and supporting a high-quality principal workforce," noting large payoffs in student learning, attendance, and teacher turnover (xviii). Darling-Hammond and colleagues published a report on developing effective principals that echoed this call, stating the link between high-quality professional learning opportunities for principals and student, teacher,

and principal outcomes; key among their findings was the need for quality coaching and mentorship for principals (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022). Our proposed model addresses the need for this type of high-quality support for principal learning and development. This is particularly important given our sample of high needs schools, as recent work has also noted that leaders in higher-poverty contexts are less likely to receive professional learning opportunities than those in low-poverty areas.

Equally as important, Goldring, Rubin, and Herrman (2021) have pointed to the potential of the AP, long understudied, to impact student outcomes, diversify the principal pool, and prepare effective principals. They emphasize the importance of investing in APs, and in particular, advocate for training and developing APs around "effective and equity-oriented practices." Our proposed model addresses the potential of the AP not only to develop into a highly effective principal but to contribute to improved student outcomes in their current role.

Table 3: Overview of Research supporting SILA Program Design

Topic	Research
Effective Principal Professional Learning	*Darling-Hammond, et al (2022). *Developing effective principals: What kind of learning matters?* Learning Policy Institute. *Foster, E. (2022). *Standards for Professional Learning: The Research*. Learning Forward. *Grissom, J. and Harrington, J. (2010). "Investing in Administrator Efficacy." *American Journal of Education*, 116, 583-612. *Jacob, R., Goddard, R., Kim, M., Miller, R., & Goddard Y. (2015). Exploring the causal impact of the McREL Balanced Leadership program on leadership, principal efficacy, instructional climate, educator turnover, and student achievement. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 37(3), 314-332. *Nunnery, J. A., et al (2011). *The Impact of the NISL Executive Development Program on School Performance in Massachusetts: Cohort 2 Results*. Norfolk, VA: Center for Educational Partnerships, Old Dominion University. *Sutcher et al (2017). *Supporting Principal's Learning*. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.
Improvement Leadership and Student Outcomes	*Carlson et al (2011). "A Multistate District-Level Cluster Randomized Trial of the Impact of Data-Driven Reform on Reading and Mathematics Achievement." *Education Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 33(3),* 378-398 *Goldring, E., Rubin, M., & Herrmann, M. (2021). *The Role of Assistant Principals: Evidence and Insights for Advancing School Leadership.* The Wallace Foundation.

	*Grissom, J., Egalite, A.J., & Lindsay, C.A. (2021). "How Principals Affect Students and Schools: A Systematic Synthesis of Two Decades of Research." New York: The Wallace Foundation. *Huber, D. and Conway, J. (2015). "The Effect of School Improvement Planning on Student Achievement." (2015). *Planning and Change*, 46(½), 56-70.

(4) Services involve the collaboration of appropriate partners for maximizing the effectiveness.

The SILA partners have assembled a strong leadership team composed of the University of Maryland, College Park (UMD), Learning Forward, and the Center for Teaching Quality (CTQ), as well as dedicated district administrators. The team assembled to deliver the School Improvement Leadership Academy represents a group of expert educators who have a strong and proven track record in designing and facilitating high quality professional learning experiences for adults, and more specifically for educational leaders. The UMD College of Education (COE) has over 200 talented faculty with deep research, practice, and teaching skills in topics including literacy, numeracy, equity, and social and emotional learning. The Center for Educational Innovation and Improvement (CEii) brings together the shared expertise of research and practice to develop leadership, improve schools, and advance equity. Leadership preparation and development is a core function of the College of Education and CEii. CEii works directly with schools, school districts, and state education agencies to build the capacity of teacher leaders, school leaders, and district leaders through training and networked improvement communities. The education doctorate in School System Leadership has graduated over 100 school system leaders. The *School Improvement Leadership* Administrator Certification program also prepares aspiring teacher leaders across Maryland to become effective school administrators. All of the leadership training and instructional curricula are aligned to both the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSELs) and the National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) standards.

UMD's primary partner for this project is Learning Forward (LF) whose mission is to set the standard for professional learning and build the capacity of educators to equitably serve all students. A major vehicle for achieving SILA's vision and mission is the Standards for Professional Learning which outline the conditions for and characteristics of professional learning that changes educator knowledge, skills, and practices, leading to improved teaching and learning for all students. LF's work is grounded in the theory that standards-driven professional learning leads to significant growth in teachers' and leaders' knowledge, skills, and beliefs, which leads to substantive growth in educator practice, which in turn leads to improvements in outcomes for each student. Learning Forward also establishes and facilitates networks and communities of practice focused on strengthening professional learning systems in order to improve teacher and leader practice and student outcomes.

Finally, the Center for Teaching Quality (CTQ) serves as our micro-credentialing partner for the project. CTQ was among the first organizations to develop educator micro-credentials in the early 2010s, working closely with Digital Promise and other national partners to develop aligned protocols for valid, high-quality micro-credentials. Since that time, CTQ has worked with a range of higher education, association, and K-12 district partners to design competency-based and personalized professional learning systems. Additionally, the organization has supported more than 200 teams to develop educator micro-credentials and has facilitated support for educators pursuing micro-credentials that boost earning rates by up to 30 percentage points. Two CTQ higher education partnerships to date – as in the proposed project with UMD and other partners – position micro-credentials as a tool for performance assessment of leadership, equity, and instructional competencies for developing educators and education

leaders. CTQ has also conducted research and policy analysis on a range of matters related to educator micro-credentials, positioning them to contribute to communications and publications.

(5) The design is appropriate to, and will successfully address, the needs of the target population.

As outlined in the Quality of Management section, the SILA project will serve high needs schools in Maryland, New Jersey and Delaware. For these high needs schools and for the leaders who are at their helm, the stakes are high in terms of how quickly and how effectively they must demonstrate progress in accelerating student achievement levels, and/or in closing achievement gaps across student subgroups. This pressure to demonstrate student achievement gains stems from the fact that Title I schools, Comprehensive Support and Improvement schools, and Targeted Support and Improvement schools are all required to develop such plans as a part of federal and state funding requirements. Moreover, many of our districts require every school to develop and design improvement plans that almost always include specific growth and achievement goals based on state and/or district assessments as well as a core set of strategies schools will employ to meet those achievement goals. The pressure to close achievement gaps has only grown during the pandemic, and the need for leaders to continue to focus on learning loss is expected to continue (Dorn, E. 2021; Lewis, K. and Kuhfeld, M. 2021).

All too often, however, this process of designing improvement plans becomes an act of compliance rather than a process of improvement. Principals are asked to set ambitious goals and are often held accountable for them, yet they receive little or no training and support on how to organize or analyze data on a wide range of school and student indicators, how to analyze the root causes of their persistent problems, how to select innovative and/or evidence-based interventions directly tied to the achievement goals, or how to test, revise and implement school interventions to work effectively within the unique contexts of particular schools and districts

(Demir et al., 2019; Herman et al., 2017; Huber & Conway, 2015; Levin et al., 2020; VanGronigen & Meyers, 2017). This type of training and support is essential to leaders' success in facilitating the improvement of teaching, and in turn, the improvement of student learning and achievement (Grissom et al., 2021; Darling-Hammond, et al., 2022). SILA is designed to provide participating leaders with guided practice and implementation coaching in developing the concrete and particular skills which comprise the many facets of effective school improvement planning. As such, SILA will use the school improvement planning process as the applied learning mechanism for school leaders to implement and scale skills and knowledge acquired in the academy.

B. SIGNIFICANCE

(1)The importance or magnitude of the results or outcomes.

We rely on three critical findings in the field to describe the potential significance of these results. First, there is a growing body of evidence supporting the potential for principals to have an impact on student outcomes, including academic achievement, attendance, and equity (Branch et al., 2012; Coelli & Greene, 2012; Duhey & Smith, 2014; Grissom et al, 2021; Marks & Printy, 2003; Neumerski, 2013; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012; Waters et al., 2003). Second, there is emerging evidence on the potential for the AP to be another powerful lever on student outcomes (Goldring et al., 2021). Third, there are renewed calls for the need for high quality professional learning opportunities for principals and APs, particularly for those leading high need schools (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022). By creating high quality learning opportunities for both principals and APs through SILA, we aim to develop school leaders' skills and capacities for effectively improving student outcomes through their school improvement

planning, namely student achievement, social emotional learning, and indicators of equity and school culture, such as disciplinary referrals and rates of chronic absenteeism.

Our intervention holds promise to build school leaders' capacity to positively influence teaching in their schools, and in turn, positively influence student learning and achievement. Recent research has estimated that the impact of replacing a below-average principal with an above-average principal results in "an additional 2.9 months of math learning and 2.7 months of reading learning each year for students in that school" (Grissom et al., pg. xiii). Far more overlooked is the potential for the AP to also influence student outcomes; a recent review of the literature indicates a return on investment for building APs' capacity to improve teaching and student learning (Goldring et al, 2021).

Critical to the effectiveness of principal and APs' connection to the improvement of teacher and student outcomes are opportunities for high-quality professional learning for leaders (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2022). This is particularly salient for school leaders working in high need contexts, as this subgroup of leaders has disproportionately less access to those learning opportunities relative to their peers in lower need schools. In a recent national survey of principals on principal turnover, co-sponsored by Learning Policy Institute and the National Association of Secondary School Principals, the researchers reported that "nearly all" participants "indicated a desire for additional professional development to (better) meet their students' needs. The most frequent requests were for professional development to support students' social-emotional development, leading schools to improve student achievement, and using school and student data to inform continuous improvement." In fact, 78% of participants indicated that they would benefit from professional development on continuous improvement and leading schools to improve student achievement (Levin and Bradley 2019). The results from

this recent national survey indicate that the majority of school leaders recognize that leading continuous improvement through strategic improvement planning is an under-developed skill area.

Several recent studies also have examined how school improvement planning is related to student achievement outcomes (Huber & Conway, 2015; Fernandez, 2011; Strunk et al, 2015). The studies by Huber and Conway and by Fernandez included correlational analyses and concluded that the quality of a school's improvement plan was positively associated with student achievement levels. The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) also suggests that focused and strategic school improvement planning serves as an essential foundation for accelerating student achievement on the annual state assessments. Given the emerging evidence base establishing the correlation between quality school improvement planning and student achievement, we hypothesize that because our Leadership Academy is dedicated to enhancing the participating principal's capacity in creating and implementing such plans, our intervention is likely to contribute to positive student achievement gains across the region.

With our proposed intervention and study, we aim to contribute to the national evidence base regarding the kinds of professional development activities that can result in the improvement of school leaders' practices as well as increased student achievement. Our Academy is designed to provide participating leaders with guided practice and implementation coaching in developing the concrete and particular skills which comprise PSEL standard #10: *School Improvement* (NPBEA, 2015). The proposed evaluation design will use surveys, interviews, and focus groups, conduct a 360-degree diagnostic pre/post assessment of school leaders and teachers, as well as conduct rigorous reviews of coaching logs to closely track and measure changes in the school leaders' professional practice. Furthermore, we will measure

student outcomes related to the improvement of leaders' practice, namely evaluating student achievement in reading and math as measured by state standardized assessments, and students' social emotional learning, as measured by school climate surveys. Given that our proposed Academy is dedicated to building school leaders' capacity with the many facets of effective school improvement planning, we foresee that our intervention will significantly accelerate the development of these targeted leadership practices for participating principals.

(2) The costs are reasonable in relation to the number of persons to be served and to the anticipated results and benefits.

The UMD School Improvement Leadership Academy is a high-touch, high yield, and cost constrained program model. The investment in the Academy would mean an investment in the professional growth and development of 140 principals and 40 APs, who serve the students and staff in 140 schools in more than 20 districts across three states. This cohort of participating leaders will be engaged in guiding the school-wide continuous improvement efforts of over 4,000 teachers and staff members, to better support the learning, development, and achievement of more than 50,000 students.

The proposed budget would ensure that the principals and APs who enroll in the Academy would be exposed to a wide array of research-based best practices in instructional and equity leadership during the first year of the program and would be provided with hands-on support to apply these practices as part of their school improvement planning in the second year of the program. Moreover, the participants in the Academy would earn up to 6 graduate credits, which could be applied to further doctoral studies at UMD or another institute of higher education, as well as up to six micro-credentials.

The cost of the Academy reflects a collective commitment to excellence in both adult learning and research. The Year 1 Academy will be staffed by leading faculty from UMD in

social emotional learning, literacy, mathematics, and equity, as well as expert facilitators from Learning Forward. In year two, UMD will hire a cadre of skilled coaches who have experience supporting principals specifically with school improvement planning. Because learning is best fostered through community, the Academy is designed to blend engaging virtual instruction with annual in-person conference style convenings.

(3) Incorporation of project purposes, activities, or benefits into the ongoing program.

We anticipate that our proposed project will not only benefit school leaders, but also benefit both the Center for Educational Innovation and Improvement (CEii) in the College of Education and the University of Maryland writ large. The University of Maryland has recently unveiled a new bold Strategic Plan. One plank of the Plan is to strengthen and grow partnerships with local K-12 schools/districts and to be responsive to the needs of the university's community partners. In response to this bold vision, the College of Education is creating a new EdTerps Learning Academy as a conduit to enable the proliferation of direct service work with school partners around the state. The development of the Academy can serve as a model in the College for other responsive and innovative approaches to professional learning for K-12 educators.

Moreover, the proposed project will further the mission and work of the Center. The proposed SILA would enable the CEii to continue to refine and deepen its work around leadership, improvement, and equity by building the capacity of principals and APs. The proposed project offers the CEii and UMD an opportunity to further build their collective capacity to fill the school leadership professional learning gap, creating modules and cohort-based options that are accessible to leaders in the local region and beyond. The program will also help the team at UMD to build a model for a stand-alone summer institute that could be supported through Title 1 or other state funding sources or through existing professional

development funds at the school/district level. Furthermore, what we learn from this will feed our work in formal and informal academic programs, such as our Administrative 1 certification program and our EdD in School System Leadership.

(4) The results of the proposed project are to be disseminated

The second year of the UMD SILA is designed to purposely accelerate our proposed intervention from an intensive group training approach to individualized implementation support and strategy dissemination across the leadership network. During the second year Fellowship, participating APs will meet monthly in their cohort group to share their learnings and their challenges with testing their selected improvement strategies. Similarly, during the second year of implementation coaching, participating principals and APs will meet quarterly in smaller cohort groups which are focused on a shared problem of practice (math achievement, ELA achievement, or SEL) to share their progress towards their improvement goals and to inform each other about what evidence-based strategies they each are implementing and which of these changes are resulting in improvement. SILA is intentionally organized to engage participants as a "Networked Improvement Community," (NIC) so that there is the structured opportunity for the exchange of the most promising improvement practices as well as a forum for documentation of the results of their individual and collective efforts and learning (Barletta, B. et al 2019; Margolini, J, Feygin, A., & Sejdijaj, A. 2021).

One opportunity for the dissemination of the results of the Academy's networked learning would be through the final Summer Institute. At the end of the third year of the project, all 180 participants would be invited to join together to present their learnings and the results of their school improvement implementation at a closing "School Improvement Leadership Conference." Participating principals and APs would have the opportunity to discuss their findings with each

other, leaders from the state education agencies in MD, NJ, and DE, and colleagues from partner organizations, including Learning Forward, Policy Study Associates, and CTQ. Additionally, the 40 APs who enroll in the Fellowship would also be positioned to help re-distribute the reach of the Academy across the region. For as these APs are promoted into new principal positions after the conclusion of the Fellowship, they would bring their enhanced leadership skills with the planning and implementation of school improvement to their new schools, thus extending the network of skilled improvement leaders beyond the 140 schools directly engaged in the Academy.

The dissemination of the learnings and results of this UMD Leadership Academy would not be limited to the state of Maryland or the region. CEII is currently part of a national Improvement Leadership Education and Development (iLEAD) network of IHEs and LEA partners, sponsored by the Carnegie Foundation on the Advancement of Teaching. As such, the faculty who would be leading the Academy would seek the appropriate university and district IRB approvals to disseminate the outcomes and impact of the project to a broader, national audience of researchers and practitioners, including the Annual Carnegie Summit on Improvement, or the "Spotlight on Quality in Continuous Improvement." We would also strongly encourage our participants to demonstrate their improvement leadership through presenting their networked learnings and results at the national Learning Forward Conference.

C. QUALITY OF THE MANAGEMENT PLAN

(1) The goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved by the proposed project are clearly specified and measurable.

The core elements of SILA, including the overview of its structure and participants, has been described in the preceding sections of this proposal. This section outlines evidence of a comprehensive and cohesive management plan that will assure both effective project

implementation and successful project outcomes. Over the course of the three-year grant period, we aim to achieve the outcomes in Table 4 that are used to guide this management plan. The Project Leadership team will meet quarterly and will, among other things, use this time to review data and to identify where implementation issues may be impeding successful outcomes.

Table 4: Goals, Objectives and Outcomes

Objective	Measurable Outcome
Goal #1: Increase principal and assistant principal knowledge and capacity in elements of School Leadership: Instructional Leadership, Equity Leadership and Improvement Leadership.	
Objective 1: Provide year-long cohort-based professional learning to 180 school leaders (140 principals, 40 assistant principals)	Outcome 1A: By year 3, 95% of participants complete all elements of the professional learning program as measured by program participation data
Objective 2: All participants complete two micro-credentials during their first year demonstrating improvement in School Leadership, including Instructional Leadership, Equity Leadership, and Improvement Leadership.	Outcome 2A: In their first year of participation, 75% of SILA participants complete two micro-credentials
	Outcome 2B: By year 3, 100% of participants report improvement in knowledge and skills in school leadership practice, including instructional leadership, equity leadership,and improvement leadership as measured by principal/school leader surveys. Outcome 2C: By year 3, 80% of teachers and other school staff in SILA participants' schools report the principals' improvement in equity leadership knowledge and skills as measured by the CALL survey. Outcome 2D: By year 3, 80% of teachers and school staff in SILA participants' schools report improvement in the principals' instructional leadership knowledge and skills as measured by the CALL survey.
Objective 3: Contribute to the diversification and retention of educator workforce in partner districts	Outcome 3A: By year 3, there is increased diversity of the educator workforce in 80% of SILA participants' schools, as measured by school administrative data. Outcome 3B: By year 3, increased educator retention in 80% of SILA participants' schools, as measured by school administrative data.
Goal #2: Prepare assistant principals to be effective principals.	
Objective 4: Provide year-long assistant principal fellowship with a mentor principal to 40 assistant principals to increase assistant principals' capacity for Instructional Leadership, Equity Leadership, and Improvement leadership.	Output 4A: 95% of AP SILA participants complete all elements of the fellowship program as measured by program participation data.

Objective 5: AP participants complete two micro-credentials during their second year demonstrating competence as Improvement Leaders.	Output 5A: By the end of year 3, 75% of AP SILA participants achieve at least 2 micro-credentials (their second year of participation).
	Outcome 5B: By the end of year 3, 100% of AP participants self-report increased knowledge and skills as improvement and equity leaders as measured by the survey of principals/school leaders.

Goal #3: Improved principal competence with School Improvement Planning

Objective 6: Provide improvement coaching to 140 principals.	Output 6A: By the end of Year 2, 95% of Principal participants complete all elements of the coaching support program as measured by program participation data.
Objective 7: Principal participants complete two additional micro-credentials during their second year of participation, further strengthening their Leadership	Output 7A: By the end of their second year of participation, 80% of SILA participants complete two additional micro-credentials
	Outcome 7B: By the end of year 2, observe measurable improvement in quality of School Improvement Plans for Cohort 1 SILA participants based on results of PIM scoring rubric
Objective 8: Observe Measurable Change in Students' Access to Equitable Learning Opportunities in SILA Participants' Schools.	Outcome 8A: By the end of year 3, observe decreased rates of chronic absenteeism in 80% of SILA participants' schools as measured by school administrative data. Outcome 8B: By the end of year 3, observe decreased rates of disciplinary referrals in SILA participants' schools as measured by school administrative data.

Goal #4: Increase Student Achievement in Mathematics and English/Language Arts in Schools Served by Participants.

Objective 9: Increase Student Achievement in ELA and mathematics in schools served by SILA participants.	Outcome 9A: By the end of year 3, 85% of students in SILA Cohort 1 participants' schools demonstrate greater achievement in mathematics than students in comparison schools as measured by Maryland, Delaware, and New Jersey state assessments.
	Outcome 9B: By the end of year 3, students in 85% of SILA Cohort 1 participants' schools demonstrate greater achievement in English/Language arts than students in comparison schools as measured by Maryland, Delaware, and New Jersey state assessments.

(2) The adequacy of the management plan to achieve the objectives

The project will be led by the PI, ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮, Professor of Practice at the UMD

College of Education and Director of the Center for Educational Innovation and Improvement

and ▮▮▮▮▮▮, Senior Faculty Specialist and the Associate Director of the CEii. SILA

leadership will oversee three coordinating teams: 1) a project leadership team, 2) an academy learning team, and 3) a district partnership team. The Co-PIs will also work closely with the data collection and evaluation team and an Advisory Board. The composition and responsibilities of each team are described in Table 5 below. Additionally, Key personnel with partner roles and responsibilities are outlined below in Table 6 (please note: resumes for all UMD personnel and partners can be found in Appendix B). A project organizational chart can also be found in Appendix H.

Table 5: Team Composition and Deliverables

Academy Team	Team Members	Team Deliverables
Project Leadership Team	*PI & Co-PI *Project Manager *UMD Graduate Assistant	* Track expenses and provide grant budget reconciliation * Prepare Grant Reports * Enroll Academy participants in UMD Canvas courses * Organize Summer Institute meeting logistics, including travel arrangements
Academy Learning Team	* Co-PI/Director of Learning * Curriculum Director * UMD Academy Faculty * Learning Forward partners * Center For Teaching Quality partners	* Establish Academy Learning Objectives * Develop Academy learning strands and modules * Coordinate with UMD faculty and LF and CTQ partners to develop and deliver modules and assessments *Train Academy Coaches and Fellowship Facilitators * Organize the Academy learning strands in UMD Canvas LMS
District Partnership Team	* PI * Project Manager *Curriculum Director	* Subscribe up to 30 partner districts in MD, NJ, and DE * Determine the selection criterion for Academy principals and APs * Communicate participant progress and Academy results with District partners
Project Evaluation Team	* PSA partners * UMD Senior Research Fellow * UMD Graduate Assistant	* Establish the project research questions and study methodology * Create survey and focus group instruments * Analyze data collected from CALL surveys and SIP rubric * Publish study findings in academic conferences and publications

Table 6: Key Roles and Responsibilities

University of Maryland: ███████████ (PI) and Professor of Practice and ████████ (co-PI) will be responsible for overall project direction, development and delivery of the Improvement Leadership strand, and partner relations and communications. ███████████ will serve as Training and Curriculum Director and have oversight over the design and organization of the Academy curriculum. Additionally, ███████████ ██████, CEii Senior Research Faculty Fellow, will support evaluation work. The Academy Director (to be hired) will coordinate with UMD Affiliate Faculty and Academy partners to facilitate the convenings and webinars, as well as the network of coaches and NIC facilitators
Learning Forward: ███████████, Senior Vice President, and ███████████, Vice President, will be responsible for the development and delivery of the Instructional Leadership strand. They will contribute to the coaching of principals and APs participating in this academy training program and will be thought partners developing and delivering the content and format of the academy They will both work directly with principals and APs and instruct during the academy convenings and Summer Institute.
Center for Teaching Quality: ███████████, President & Partner and ███████████ Executive Director & Partner will lead competency identification and mapping, facilitate development processes for the micro-credentials, and coordinate support for participants pursuing micro-credentials.
Policy Studies Associates: ███████████, Senior Managing Director for Policy Studies Associates, is responsible for project evaluation. Dr. Julie Meredith will be responsible for quantitative analyses for the impact evaluation. ███████████ will conduct qualitative analyses.
Project Advisory Board: Associate Dean, ███████████, College of Education, UMD; ███████████, Vice President of Strategic Initiatives at Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching; and ███████, former Superintendent of Anne Arundel and Prince George's County Public Schools. The Advisory Board will provide professional knowledge, contacts, and insights to help guide the project's planning and implementation.

Major activities are identified for each year of the SILA program along with the milestone timeline for completion in Table 7. For an overview of the Project Evaluation design and instrumentation, please see Table 8 in Section D. For this project, we will use, as a primary platform for the Academy, OpenLearning, an innovative solution that UMD has previously deployed for credit-bearing and noncredit-bearing courses and professional development. Participating principals will engage in synchronous and asynchronous virtual learning, including training webinars, seminars, and virtual coaching, among others. OpenLearning will allow participants to interact with one another through Academy activities and Summer Institutes. Likewise, surveys and assessments will be uploaded to make them accessible to participating principals and APs in SILA. Finally, micro-credentials will be linked to completion of some

assessments so principals can earn up to six micro-credentials over the course of their

participation. These micro-credentials will also be housed in a dedicated online platform space

for the Academy and UMD, to which participants can link through OpenLearning.

Table 7: Project Activities and Timeline

Deliverables	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Participant	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	NA
	_____	_____	NA
		_____	_____
	NA	NA	_____
			_____

D. QUALITY OF PROJECT EVALUATION

(1) Evidence Produced by the Evaluation will meet WWC Standards

The proposed evaluation plan will contribute high-quality evidence and insights to the field about the effects of principal and AP participation in a high-quality professional learning program. The impact evaluation component **comprises a quasi-experimental matched comparison group design that will meet the *What Works Clearinghouse Group Design Standards with reservations*.** The comparison group in this cluster-level assignment study will be constructed to ensure differences between intervention and comparison groups of less than 0.25 standard deviations on key baseline characteristics.

UMD will contract with Policy Studies Associates (PSA) to conduct an independent evaluation of the implementation and impact of SILA. PSA will use a mixed-methods process evaluation that will include a review of (1) administrative/participation data generated during the operation of SILA; (2) student assessment scores and measures of student's social-emotional learning[2] for students in the schools of participating principals/school leaders and their matched comparisons, derived from state data files; (3) surveys, interviews, and participation/activity logs of SILA coaches; (4) school improvement plans; (5) surveys, interviews, and focus groups of participating principals/APs and their teachers or other school staff; and (6) focus groups with community members. In particular, the study will include the Comprehensive Assessment for Leadership Learning (CALL) assessment, a nationally validated 360[0] diagnostic pre/post assessment of school leaders and teachers that measures five domains of leadership practice (Kelley & Halverson, 2012).[3] In addition, the evaluation will employ the Planning,

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[2] Maryland administers the Maryland School Climate Survey, Delaware administers the Delaware School Climate Survey, and New Jersey administers the New Jersey School Climate Improvement (NJ SCI) Survey.
[3] The five domains include: (1) focus on learning, (2) monitoring teaching and learning, (3) building nested learning communities, (4) acquiring and allocating resources, and (5) maintaining a safe and effective learning environment.

Implementation, and Monitoring (PIM) School Improvement Audit rubric[4] to evaluate the quality

of the school improvement plans (SIPs) of participating SILA principals/APs. The rubric,

developed by the Leadership and Learning Center (CPA, 2005) and used in prior research (Huber

& Conway, 2015; Reeves, 2011), has been used to demonstrate a positive relationship between

the quality of SIPs, as measured by PIM scores, and student achievement.

Overall, the information collected for the evaluation will be used to assess the fidelity of

implementation and to explore the mechanisms by which SILA impacts schools and students.

Table 8 shows the research questions guiding the evaluation design and the planned data sources

that PSA will use to answer them.

Table 8: Research Questions and Data Instruments

Research Question	Data Source(s)
RQ1: To what extent is SILA implemented with fidelity? Do the expected numbers of principals enroll and acquire sufficient knowledge and skills to apply them as part of their practice at their home schools? To what extent does SILA implementation vary by school type or context?	● Data on principal/AP enrollment, persistence, and completion of SILA, including completion of UMD micro-credential, earned graduate credits, and/or enrollment in UMD EdD program ● Interviews of SILA project staff ● Interviews of district leaders of participating SILA schools ● Surveys of SILA coaches (Academy II, Year 2) ● Coach reports/logs on coaching activities ● Survey of SILA principals/APs
RQ2: To what extent do SILA principals/school leaders improve their school improvement plans (SIPs) during and after SILA participation?	● School-level NIC formation ● Survey of SILA principals/school leaders ● Survey of SILA coaches (Academy II, Year 2) ● Focus groups of teachers/school staff (sample); community ● Pre/post SIP reviews based on PIM scoring rubric
RQ3: To what extent do SILA principals/school leaders improve their performance as equity leaders in their schools during and after their program participation?	● CALL pre/post assessment of principals/school leaders ● CALL pre/post assessment of teachers/other school staff ● Coach reports/logs (Academy II, Year 2) ● Interviews and focus groups with SILA principals/school leaders ● Focus groups with teachers/other school staff (sample) in SILA schools

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[4] The PIM scoring rubric measures five domains or areas of school improvement: (1) comprehensive needs assessment, the inquiry process, SMART goals (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely), design, and evaluation. Scoring is based on a three-point scale: exemplary (3), proficient (2), and needs improvement (1).

RQ4: What impact does school leaders' participation in SILA have on school- and student-level outcomes? RQ4a. What impact does school leaders' participation in SILA have on students' math and ELA achievement? RQ4b. What impact does school leaders' participation in SILA have on increasing staff retention and staff diversity?	● Identify comparison schools similar to the schools of the 70 MD, DE, and NJ principals and APs participating in SILA ● Rates of SILA principal/school leader retention ● Rates of teacher retention in participants' schools ● Rates of AP placements into principal hiring pools or principalships ● MSDE, DDOE, and NJDOE student-level assessment data in reading and math and SEL data ● Student-level descriptors from administrative data from MSDE, DDOE, and NJDOE ● School characteristics from state data files from MSDE, DDOE, and NJDOE

(2) Evaluation will provide performance feedback and permit periodic assessment of progress

The evaluation is designed to provide frequent formative feedback and regular summative results to allow ongoing adaptation and improvement of SILA and its implementation**.** The evaluation will report regularly on the analysis of formative data collected through surveys, interviews, focus groups, and administrative data reviews to provide developers with timely feedback about progress towards planned outcomes and challenges that emerge during principal's/school leaders' enrollment in SILA Academy I and II; their persistence, performance, and completion of each Academy; and in the pace and depth of the application of the knowledge and skills acquired during SILA into the academic practices of their school over two subsequent years. PSA will analyze and report the beginning and end-of-year data to SILA staff for purposes of informing discussions with participating principals and other school leaders about data-driven decision making and for tailoring coaching based on the results. The evaluation will provide performance feedback and assessment of progress towards achieving the project's intended outcomes, as shown in Table 9 below.

Table 9: Performance Feedback and Schedule

Mechanism	Purpose and Benefits

Bi-monthly discussion w/SILA staff	Updates on evaluation progress and findings on quality of SILA implementation
Interim Report 1: Fall 2023	Findings from review of (1) coach and principal/school leader surveys, interviews, and focus groups on SILA implementation; (2) school improvement plans; (3) CALL assessment of principals/school leaders and their teachers; and (4) school-level administrative data, including test scores and measures of SEL. Will include a profile of participating schools and identification of comparison schools.
Interim Report 2: Fall 2024	Update on implementation findings plus comparison to baseline performance information for the students enrolled in participant and comparison schools.
Final Report: 2025	Report and disseminate findings from the implementation and impact evaluations.

Data Collection Plan: When finalizing the data collection plan for implementation evaluation, PSA will maximize use of student- and school-level administrative data available through state departments (e.g., student demographic and achievement data) or routinely collected as part of the operation of SILA. For each principal/school leader enrolling in SILA, PSA will collect school demographic data and human resource data to report on measures included as Government Performance Results Act (GPRA) indicators for the SEED competition, including (1) % of participants that serve high-need students; (2) % of participants that serve concentrations of high-need students and are highly effective; (3) % of participants that serve concentrations of high-need students, are highly effective and serve for two years. UMD will report on the cost per participant, based on SILA budget expenditures.

PSA will use CALL assessment data for the monitoring improvements in five domains of leadership practice (e.g., focus on learning; building a nested learning community; maintaining a safe and effective learning environment; monitoring teaching and learning; and acquiring and allocating resources) in the intervention schools. PSA will license the CALL assessment from the Wisconsin Center for Education Products and Services (WCEPS) and administer it to all participating SILA principals and their teachers at the beginning and end of each school year during the three-year grant cycle. Finally, PSA will conduct quality reviews (based on the PIM

scoring rubric) of school improvement plans (SIPs) beginning the summer prior to the start of

Cohort 1 participation in SILA and every year thereafter for the next three years.

(3) Evaluation includes the use of performance measures related to intended project outcomes

Table 10 provides the objective performance measures proposed for each of the intended

outcomes of SILA. The performance measures reflect information that will be generated from

both the implementation and impact evaluations.

Table 10: Research Questions (RQ) and Performance Measures

RQ	Performance Measures
RQ1	Extent to which SILA is implemented with fidelity *(via review of SILA administrative data; interviews with district leaders and SILA project staff; and interviews and surveys of all participating SILA principals/school leaders, and SILA coaches in 2023, 2024, 2025)*
RQ2	Extent to which SILA principals improve their school improvement plans (SIPs), i.e., of participating principals, % improving their SIPs based on PIM scores? *(via rigorous review of principals' SIPs (1) in the two years prior to participating in SILA; and (2) after receiving SILA professional learning and support in 2023 and 2024 for Cohort 1. Also focus groups of SILA principals/school leaders as well as their teachers and other school staff (sample), and community members in 2023, 2024, and 2025)*
RQ3	Extent to which principals improve their performance as equity leaders, i.e., of participating SILA principals, % improving their performance? (*via pre- and post-participation CALL assessment of principals/school leaders; CALL assessment of teachers in participating SILA schools; principal/school leader survey; focus groups of teachers (sample); coach logs and surveys, collected annually for all measures*)
RQ4, RQ4a, RQ4b	Extent to which students in participating schools improve performance on state mathematics and reading assessments as well as on measures of social-emotional learning compared with similar students in non-participating schools *(MD, NJ, and DE assessments in mathematics and reading, measures of SEL; annually 2023, 2024, 2025)* Extent to which we observe increased staff retention and staff diversity in SILA participants' schools (*MD, NJ, and DE school staff administrative data; annually 2023, 2024, 2025*)

(4) *The methods of evaluation will provide valid and reliable performance data*

For the impact evaluation, we propose a matched comparison group quasi-experimental

design using baseline data from the 2021-22 school year. The treatment group will comprise the

students enrolled in 70 TSI schools in Maryland, New Jersey, and Delaware led by SILA Cohort

1.[5] For each treatment school, comparison schools will be selected from the remaining TSI schools in Maryland, New Jersey, and Delaware, respectively, whose principals did not participate in SILA. We will then identify a student-level comparison group, matching at least one student from each comparison school to one student from each school led by a SILA participant.

Disruptions to school operations, state assessments, and student achievement stagnation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic necessitate careful consideration of the school year used as the baseline measure. After considering the advantages and disadvantages of other options (e.g., using data from the 2018-19 school year, using data from interim assessments administered during the 2020-21 school year), PSA opted for the 2021-22 school year data for baseline measurement. While not ideal, data from this school year captures, for example, the effects of school disruptions on schools and students (an advantage over using 2018-19 data) and was administered under more consistent conditions than 2020-21 interim assessments.[6]

The validity and reliability of the study results, however, will depend on the strength of the school- and student-level matches. PSA will use two rounds of coarsened exact matching (CEM)[7] to identify the comparison groups for Cohort 1. The first round will be conducted at the school level, using school-level administrative data from the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE), and the Delaware

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[5] Although the initiative intends to serve two cohorts, the impact analyses will only be conducted for Cohort 1, because we do not anticipate school- and student-level outcome data will be available for Cohort 2 within the three-year time frame of the grant.

[6] Studies examining the impact of COVID-19 on students' achievement have provided evidence that pre-pandemic assessment scores may not serve as appropriate comparisons with assessment scores post-pandemic, due to, for example, changes in the composition of students in schools (Schweig et al., 2022), differences in growth expectations after the start of the pandemic (Lewis and Kuhfeld, 2021; Renaissance, 2022), and increased variation in the conditions under which students took interim and summative assessments during the 2020-21 school year (Renaissance, 2022).

[7] CEM is a monotonic imbalance-reducing method for identifying a comparison group that can account for imbalances by coarsening key continuous variables (e.g., race, gender, baseline achievement) by allowing analysts to adjust the closeness of matches on one variable without impacting the balance on other matching variables.

Department of Education (DDOE), such as grades served, school size, prior student achievement, student characteristics (e.g., percent of students economically disadvantaged, race and ethnicity of enrolled students, percent of students identified as English Language learners), school climate scores, number of building-level administrators, principal's tenure at a school, and years of experience as a school leader. This process will identify one matched comparison school for each treatment school.

A second round of CEM will be conducted at the student level[8], using student-level administrative data from MSDE, NJDOE, and DDOE[9], including student characteristics, disability status, English learner status, performance on state assessments in grades 3-8, and the attendance/chronic absenteeism rate. The set of comparison schools will be selected so that differences in mean baseline achievement scores of the treatment and comparison groups are less than 0.25 standard deviations of the pooled sample, with the aim of achieving differences of less than 0.05 standard deviations. A quasi-experimental design with differences in mean baseline outcomes of 0.25 standard deviations or less can meet WWC group design standards with reservations. To control for any differences in baseline achievement scores and demographic composition between the treatment and comparison groups, we will include school-level and student-level covariates and baseline achievement in our statistical models.

To determine the minimum detectable effect size (MDES), we used Optimal Design (Raudenbush, et al., 2011). Our power analysis assumes an average of 250 students in 70 treatment and 70 comparison groups, an alpha of 0.05, and an intraclass correlation coefficient of 0.10. Under these conditions, the analysis yielded an MDES of 0.15. Based on the Carlson et al.

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[8] Based on our preliminary review of school enrollments, we believe it is reasonable to expect to find at least one comparison student for every student enrolled in a treatment school.

[9] MSED, NJDOE, and DDOE will make student-level administrative data available to researchers through a formal research review and approval process. Once approved, researchers complete a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

study (2011) presented earlier we predict an effect size of at least 0.21 for SILA, and possibly higher as improvement science will be combined with the other leadership development strategies described in Section A1. The MDES for our proposed research design of 0.15 indicates that the impact evaluation has sufficient statistical power to detect program effects of the magnitude projected for SILA.

The impact analyses will use three-level hierarchical linear growth models, nesting time points in students and students in schools, and include measures on the extent to which the principals adopt and apply the skills and knowledge of SILA. To measure changes in student achievement and SEL, we will analyze changes in student achievement and SEL between the 2021-22 and 2023-24 school years (1 baseline and 2 follow-up time points) for the 70 treatment schools and the 70 matched comparison schools in Cohort 1. To make assessment scores comparable across grades, subjects, years, and states (i.e., MD, NJ, DE), we will standardize scores within each grade, subject, year, and state. Finally, we will analyze the extent to which SILA impacts vary by state, by school type (i.e., elementary or middle), or by student characteristics, such as EL students or those with disabilities. We will determine whether variation in SILA implementation, including schools where APs and/or principal supervisors also received SILA support, was associated with differences in student-level outcomes.

(5) Design for implementing and evaluating the proposed project to guide possible replication.

The proposed evaluation design will provide numerous opportunities to learn about the implementation and impact of this leadership development model. The evaluation will regularly gather and analyze data related to implementing each of SILA's core components. For example, data from coaching logs will provide useful insights into what facilitates or impedes the extent to which high-quality coaching can effect changes in leader practices. The evaluation will also

provide insights into the impact of SILA professional learning experiences and support on the school improvement process for TSI schools. Analyses of school improvement plans via the PIM School Improvement Audit rubric will provide a window into how SILA learning opportunities support the development and implementation of effective systems and structures for school improvement. Interviews and focus groups with school leaders, teachers, coaches, and community members, as well as responses to the CALL survey, will provide in-depth information about how SILA professional development affects the overall school community including how leaders approach a range of activities from parent and community engagement to development and support of both teachers and assistant principals. Together, these various data sources will provide a clear picture of the level and type of effort required to affect measurable changes in leader practice over time. This information will be of great use as schools, districts, and states work towards identifying and implementing effective plans for Covid-19 recovery and improvement strategies.

Finally, the effects study will produce evidence to guide school leaders in the implementation of the SILA leadership development model. Project activities, evaluation measures, and findings will be used to create a toolkit, including information about implementation, monitoring, and evaluation such as surveys, rubrics, and strategies. In addition,we will submit the study results for publication in a peer-reviewed journal as well as present the evaluation results in a series of webinars with Maryland, New Jersey, and Delaware districts and schools as well as at one or more professional conferences.