

Ep #427: Why Dual Language Education Works with Eric Bethel and Dr. Maggie Marcus



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Angela Kelly

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Hello, empowered principals. Welcome to episode 427.

Welcome to *The Empowered Principal® Podcast*, a not so typical educational resource that will teach you how to gain control of your career and get emotionally fit to lead your school and your life with joy by refining your most powerful tool, your mind. Here's your host certified life coach Angela Kelly.

Well, hello my empowered principals. Happy Tuesday. You are going to enjoy this week's podcast. I did an epic interview with a couple of experts in multilingualism, bilingualism, and teaching in multiple languages. It is so fascinating. It is so valuable, especially considering what we are going through, particularly in this nation, but across the globe. We are a global community, and we want to honor and respect the culture, the language, and the value that being able to connect and communicate in multiple languages has for children and adults alike. So enjoy this episode.

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Angela Kelly: I have Eric Bethel and Dr. Maggie Marcus here with me today. And today we are discussing a topic that is near and dear to my heart on bilingualism and multilingualism. And I have two experts here in the room with me. We had a conversation a week or so ago offline, and I wanted to bring this topic to the podcast. It's very relevant in today's educational world, all that's going on in our educational system, and just the global aspect of our humanity now and the ability to connect with one another across the globe invites us into instructing in different languages. And so we're here to talk about that today. I'm going to turn the mic over to Eric and Maggie and let them introduce themselves, tell you a little bit about their backgrounds, and we're going to dive right in. So Eric, I'm going to start with you.

Eric Bethel: Angela, first of all, thank you for having us on. It's such a pleasure to be part of The Empowered Principal podcast. My name is Eric

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Bethel. I am a native Washingtonian and a lifelong DC Public Schools educator. I'm in my 25th year in DC Public Schools. I taught for about a decade at a wonderful little school called Marie Reed, which happened to be a school that had a dual language program.

I taught for about a decade, and then I moved into school leadership, where I met Maggie, who's also on the call you meet very soon at Powell Elementary School, where I was an assistant principal for a few years. Then I became a principal, which was my absolute joy of all jobs that I've done. It was the hardest but most rewarding work. And I now sit in a role of an instructional superintendent, which means I'm responsible for a portfolio of 14 schools, eight of our schools in my portfolio of schools are dual language programs, which brings me here with you today. And outside of my work life, I'm a father of two beautiful little humans, a second grader, Naomi, and my oldest son who is a seventh grader figuring out middle school. So thank you for having me.

Angela Kelly: Oh, it's such a pleasure to have you, and I'm so glad to have met you. Dr. Maggie, welcome.

Maggie Marcus: Hello. Thank you, Angela. It's, as Eric said, it's a pleasure to be here and a special honor to be here with Eric, too. So this is really fun. I don't have quite the same path. I admire and always kind of wished I was a principal, but I was a public school teacher first in Puerto Rico for two years. I didn't really think I wanted or would plan to be a teacher. And then went to, I moved to California for a year. I went to grad school for international relations. I was brought to DC by the Central Intelligence Agency, and I've been here for almost 18 years, which is pretty hard to believe.

So I was an economic analyst there for a couple of years, and then very smooth and normal transition to a second grade teaching position in a DC public school. I had earned my teaching certification in Puerto Rico, so it was a relatively straightforward return, which is interesting to go back to the

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classroom. And I was there for a couple of years where I met Eric at Powell Elementary School. And then I transitioned to being an instructional coach for Spanish literacy teachers at a bilingual charter school. And from there, I went to University of Maryland. I spent a year at AU at American University earning a certificate in bilingual education, but then transitioned to University of Maryland in 2015 as a student and finished my doctorate work there. I've stayed on as adjunct faculty, and I also run our family foundation, which is the Sullivan Family Charitable Foundation. And we focus almost exclusively on multilingual learners and equitable access to dual language education. And I do a lot of work with Eric and his team in DC Public Schools. And sorry, I forgot, since Eric brought his children, I have three bilingual daughters that are eight, 11, and almost 13. So Eric and I commiserate over the middle school seventh grader.

Angela Kelly: Oh, the middle school years. There's nothing quite like it.

Maggie Marcus: That's right.

Angela Kelly: Yes, yes. So we are all parents, we are all educators. We have a lot in common. And we've all worked in schools or school districts that have one, served students with multilingual backgrounds or at least bilingual backgrounds. I know I worked in a school where Spanish was a common second language or primary language for many students and they were learning English as a second or third or fourth language. And then we also had a program that was a dual lingual program within our district. And many, many students were served through that program and continue to be served through that program. It's still thriving.

And we'll talk about this in the podcast, but it's very interesting the shift from the perception of bilingualism, and I would love to get into that with you. But for listeners who may not have experience with bilingual school, bilingual education, can we just cover that base real quickly and give an overview of what bilingual education is, multilingual education is in case there is a listener out there who is not as familiar with the concept.

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Maggie Marcus: Yeah, sure. So I think of bilingual education as a really big umbrella. And then under it, you have different kinds of programs. So the program that we talk about the most and I think in DC, Eric can add to this, is a two-way immersion, dual language immersion or two-way immersion, and then there's also a couple one-way immersion programs. What distinguishes dual language programs is that you have maybe not equal, but at least ideally 30% of target language speakers. So if we take Spanish and English, ideally you have a population that's like 50% English speakers and Spanish speakers, but at least 30% Spanish speakers, that being the target language in my example.

And so one of the main pieces aside from having peer groups that speak the target language and English is also having content in the second or the target language. So you might be learning math in Spanish or social studies in addition to like a Spanish language arts class. And that's what really creates that dual language model for students where they have to not only know the language but learn to manipulate the language in a content relevant to whatever grade they are in.

Angela Kelly: Right. So there's that academic language on top of just the vernacular. Okay. So it sounds like what you're saying is there are children whose primary language may be English, primary language may be Spanish, and they're working together. So some are learning Spanish as a second language, other kids are learning English maybe as a second language, but they're working together, and they're receiving content in both languages.

Maggie Marcus: Correct. So the teacher would be already fluent in both of those languages. Yes, or you have two different teachers in many cases that, you know, one is the English teacher and one is the Spanish teacher. The cool thing also with having those kids that have different primary languages is that then they get to be experts in their own language. So it

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really changes the dynamic in that sense in that both groups of students are learners, but both also get to be the linguistic experts of their. Yes.

Angela Kelly: And how much fun is that for kids to be able to take turns supporting one another in a classroom explaining, you know, math in Spanish to an English speaker and vice versa, maybe in science or social studies, and just the beauty of that combination really allows students to take ownership of not just learning, but supporting their peers.

Eric Bethel: Yeah, absolutely. That's where the magic falls, Angela. Just to add a little more texture to the idea of dual language programming, it's really an instructional model that's designed around four pillars. And we really try to anchor our programming around the idea of bilingualism and biliteracy, but also really reaching high levels of academic achievement. And the fourth pillar, which absolutely brings a lot of joy, and I hope makes its way into our conversation today, is around cross-cultural competence. It's lifting that language is identity, language represents culture, and it creates a holistic school community and environment across languages.

Angela Kelly: Absolutely. And that is actually the depth of this conversation today because I think most people can understand that we have different languages around the globe and different languages that families come into our school districts with as their primary language. And our goal is to connect with those families, to welcome those families, to include them into instruction, but to help empower them and make them thrive in a way that feels that their language isn't a detriment to their capacity to learn and their access to learning, but it's actually an asset. And using language and teaching various languages in a way where we leverage that asset and we value it, we understand its value and we celebrate it in a way that is, I always talk to my school leaders about, you know, a grand slam win.

So making it a win for students, for staff, for the school district, the leaders in the district, but the community at large. That makes the grand slam win when it's a win-win-win-win. And this is what I hear you addressing is how

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do we help students from any language come in, feel welcome, feel included, have access to education, connect with their peers, and to establish, it really empowers kids to have this global presence because they have the capacity to connect and communicate in multi languages.

Eric Bethel: Angela, we say all the time in a dual language community, and I'm sure you know that language is a superpower. And what we see in our own district data, and I think with trends nationally, is that the longer students are in dual language programs, we see long-term academic success and outcomes across both languages. Particularly we see the advantage for our English language learners. And in DCPS, we adapted a dual language models out of the sense of creating a strong service delivery model for our English language learners. And so something that you'll also hear folks in the dual language community talk about is that dual language instruction and language instruction is additive and it's not subtractive. So students develop English proficiency while strengthening their own home language, not in place of their own language, but in addition to, which is very, very powerful. It sends all kinds of messages and it actually helps build skills that are transferable across both languages.

It also helps students, you know, we see often, we have seen often times where English language learners have become isolated learners. They're either pulled out of general ed content instruction to receive some intervention for English language, and what gets lost in that sort of a shuffle for students is access to grade level content, the study of some historic time period, or the analysis of some great literary text because we don't think they have access to that content via language. But in a dual language setting, we pair content across languages. And so students whose L1 is not the targeted language of instruction for half the time, maybe 50% of the learning, it is for the other 50%. And what Maggie and I are working very hard to do is support teachers in creating an amazing bridge that really services, builds the students' full repertoire in the context of content.

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Angela Kelly: That is amazing, and that is the goal. It's not just about the English language portion of your day where, I know in elementary schools, it's, you know, we tend to cut the day up in terms of content. And then when we get to middle and high school, kids are shifting around, but it's still very content focused. And what you're saying is you're blending the two where it's language and content together, and it's an addition to, it's like academic language in the sciences, in the math area, in history, in, you know, spoken language, debate as you get up into the high school levels. And really being able to be completely literate in at least the two languages, if not more, depending on, you know, how the programs are set up. And so in the programs, I guess this is a new question that I have for you, Eric, in the programs that you are overseeing, are they limited to two languages? And is it, would you consider like a separate program from a general education school, or is it integrated into what you would call like a traditional public school?

Eric Bethel: Thank you for that question, Angela. So we have eight elementary dual language programs that in six of the eight schools, all students that attend are attending the dual language program. So all students in that school. In two of our eight schools, there are two schools in one. We have one school for students who are learning only in English, and we have some students in that school who are learning in English and in Spanish. And what we found is that our students in our dual language programs, especially our English language learners, are having greater academic success than our English language learners that are not in dual language programs. Does that make sense? And so part of what we're learning to do as a district is to think about how we create more opportunity and expand and think more about creating this kind of dual language learning environment for more schools and more students in the city.

Angela Kelly: That's wonderful. I love hearing the stats and the success rates of these students because I can see how an educator or a school leader might think, isn't that confusing them? Isn't that complicating things?

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It's hard enough to teach in one language, let alone and teach in two languages. But it sounds like the data is speaking for itself where the kids aren't being more confused or more bogged down. They're actually maybe connecting in their brain, like developing, you know, those connections where they are expanding and opening and evolving their brain to think in two languages, content-related, academic language, and also be able to access, you know, keep their primary language, but access an entirely another language at the same time.

Maggie Marcus: I would add too that what Eric was referring to, like the two schools in one, like the strand programs, tend to have, and there's some research that documents just how there's more of a division because you have these two different programs in one school, whereas if you have a whole school model where everyone is participating, it feels more equitable, and it also feels more cohesive. I think sometimes in what we see is there's then some like have and have not issues in the strand programs, but there's also a lot of political will that plays into if you can have a whole school model and what the community really wants. So in some cases, it's not, it might not be feasible to have a whole school model, even though that might create more of a like a more cohesive school. And so yeah, so sometimes that's part of the difference too.

Angela Kelly: Yeah. No, I've actually experienced that. We've had strand programs in our district, and then we also, here's what I found so fascinating is that when I first started teaching, the English-only families were kind of shying away from wanting their children to learn another language. And over the course of time, people started really seeing the value, people started appreciating bilingualism, multilingualism, and they were seeing the benefits of that. And it has become something, at least, you know, in the state of California where I taught and was a district site and district leader, it became a coveted, it became like a sought-after skill and a sought-after environment to be in. And people want their children in

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programs from an early age to learn to fully integrate the second language into their identity and to be able to be fully literate in that.

So I really embrace that change. I love seeing that. And I'm curious to know your experiences with shifting from maybe a strand type of model into like a whole school model. And are there schools out there that are traditional public schools who have, you know, a percentage of language, you know, differences and languages on their campus, and how might a school principal just even start addressing this topic, approaching the topic to leverage the skill and the talent that they have on their campus as it is right now?

Eric Bethel: Angela, it's such a great question, and you're right, it can be counterintuitive to think to put your child in front of content or academic skills in a language that they are not speaking at home that they're not proficient in. No one wants their child to accumulate gaps in their knowledge or in their skills because they don't have access to the language of instruction. And what we've learned is that educating or trying to have collaborative dialogue with families is critical to thinking about either introducing a dual language model or thinking about integrating across merging two strands into one strand or even getting folks to realize what is available to them in terms of their options in school.

And so we spend a lot of time engaging families to talk about the research, to talk about the data, to talk about the experience, to help people understand, help families understand what metalinguistic awareness and cognitive flexibility and what a full language repertoire does for a child's literacy and overall academic growth over time. And again, it's not intuitive. The other question or concern we often get from communities and families is around, how do I support my child at home? What do I do when my child brings home, say, homework in Spanish or an assignment in a language that I'm not proficient in? And parents want to be able to support their children at home. And so we're really creative and thoughtful about how we

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offer support to families to support their children in the way that we partner academically with families.

Angela Kelly: Yes. Thank you for highlighting that because I can see where families might be afraid that they're not going to be able to help their students. They're their student might get lost kind of in the shuffle of the two languages, but also that they may end up like leaning towards one language over the other and perhaps losing their capacity to speak their primary language, which I know Spanish speaking families have expressed that concern for decades, you know. But English, I can see how English families might have that same concern. So by you communicating with them and giving them the skills and the tools and the understanding of how they can support their child as the child's navigating the two languages at school, that can ease a parent's mind and heart so that they can continue to focus on the value that their child's receiving and when you were speaking, what came to mind for me was, you know, we're looking at ways we can expand and evolve education to meet the current demands and the needs for students as we're preparing them for adulthood.

And this is one of the pivots that we can make to create educational programming that is in alignment with the globalization of our humanity, basically, because we can go anywhere, we can talk to anybody with the internet, we can be online with anyone, and the ability to communicate and to interact, it only expands and enhances your capacity to serve in the world as it would with just, you know, being limited to one language. So I really appreciate that you guys are taking time to work not just with kids, but with their families as well.

Maggie Marcus: I think too, Angela, one thing I notice is that the message that you just shared about being able to be more economically successful, have more opportunities available, seems to be the message that resonates more broadly than the cultural social justice message that might be at the center of the why I do and support this work. So it's really

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interesting also, and you know this very well in California, is to really think about the how we can like market dual language for all students, but primarily for our Spanish-speaking students who would have the most to gain from that sort of program.

And there is a one of my favorite academic studies, Eric, I don't know if you've heard me talk about this before, but it's an old study. It's the Schechter and Bailey from 1997. I'm happy to send it to you, Angela, to link in the notes, but it looked at the difference between families in California, Mexican-American families in California and Texas and what they thought of the role of the school in language education. And there was a very big difference in the California families really believing that Spanish native language education was the parents' responsibility, whereas the families in Texas really had a different opinion that the schools should also participate in the maintenance and cultivation of their native language. And so I think that's also a piece that Eric and I think about with the work is trying to have that conversation with families and hopefully show them the value that having that language in school can add to their child's education.

Angela Kelly: Absolutely. And that's why I love the approach that you're taking. And I know that the Sullivan Foundation financially supports schools and empowers schools to, I feel like what's happening is like you're one, you're like helping people understand the value and bring in the language. But underneath that language, the foundation of the language is the culture, is the way that we interact, the way that we communicate, and the human to human connection regardless of the language that we speak. It's about developing the culture, developing connections, the way that we communicate, and celebrate one another and honor without asking people to leave certain parts of them at the door as they walk onto our campus, but to bring all of you in, including language.

And language is one way that we connect at a global level, but bringing in the culture into the culture of the school, right? So that it becomes a part of

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the school culture at large when people are speaking a second language, they're not just linguistically, you know, communicating and listening, you know, learning and listening in the language, they're also taking in all of the language that the language has to offer. Is that what I'm hearing?

Eric Bethel: Absolutely, Angela. You know, that idea that language is inseparable from identity and that dual language education in our schools in DCPS really affirms students and families is so visible. It's visceral. You can feel it in our communities, especially now. I mean, we know that validating home language as an asset makes students feel a sense of belonging, and that's just foundational to learning. You cannot learn in a place where you don't feel you have a place. I think that our promotion of cultural reciprocity and mutual respect and the way that it garners trust from families does a whole lot both in the academic environment but also just in a broader school community. And I'd be remiss if I didn't, you know, just speak to what some of our migrant communities are feeling right now in this day, some of the anxiety and uncertainty around some of the immigration policies. And I think in our settings where we have already affirmed people based on how they show up with their authentic language, families and students, that we're creating the spaces that are buffers to some of the stress that folks are under right now. Would you say you've seen similar or feel similar in our schools here in DC?

Maggie Marcus: Me, right? Yeah, I guess I'm the one that is in the schools with you in DC. Yes. I really and I think I hear so much anecdotally from school communities and school leaders about how their community members are showing up for each other during this time of uncertainty and providing a space and a feeling of safety for families. And I don't know, I can't speak to how that's happening sort of generally across DC schools. I think certainly in the dual language schools, you really see the community rallying around the more vulnerable populations and really supporting, you know, supporting access for all, but supporting their other community members that are now facing some really anxiety-producing times,

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especially, I mean, across the country and I think especially in DC being a nation's capital.

Angela Kelly: Absolutely. And, you know, I am so glad this topic has been brought up because while we're not a political podcast, education is impacted by politics, has, you know, it has some political power over decisions made in the Department of Education and all the way down. So, but we speak to what can school leaders, school leaders and district leaders do to, number one, I was just having this conversation with a colleague over the weekend around the purpose of school and people are a little bit struggling with the purpose of school because it's it has evolved and we're catching up to what that is. And, you know, it comes down at its very basic to safety. Our campuses are designed for every child to feel safe. And a part of what I love about these programs is that when you come onto a campus and there are other people speaking the language that you know how to speak, that is a level of safety that you feel as a student on that campus. And if there are teachers speaking it, that's even feels safer and even more comforting. And now you have content in that language, there's another layer of comfort and safety for students.

And that's where you start to feel valued, you feel acknowledged, validated, you feel more equity in who you are as an individual student, that your community is not just paying lip service to like we're putting a poster up for Cinco de Mayo, but that there's actually cultural conversations happening from the minute you step onto that campus day one and in the classrooms, in the content conversations, in the staff meetings, at the district, you know, level, it's throughout the culture of the district that maintains the emotional, mental, and physical safety at this point of our students, our staff members, and our families. And that is where this conversation on bilingualism, it goes beyond a student learning a second language or, you know, the privilege of being able to learn Spanish as an English-speaking child. It goes into actual community that is tethered when times get tough, when

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storms come through, when families are going through something difficult or a staff member, it bonds us.

And that goes far beyond just being able to say, hola, you know, and ask where the bathroom is like when you're on vacation. It's beyond that. And I think we really want to address that. This is more than just language. It's more than just asking or being able to order at a restaurant. This is not Duolingo or whatever the apps are. I mean, not to put down those apps, but just it's more than that. It's the human to human connection and the building of community that creates a sense of safety, a sense of protection, a sense of comfort, but a true sense of belonging and I kind of picture like gathering, you know, circling the wagons when the time comes to protect all of our kids at our at our campuses. So this goes beyond just being able to communicate verbally in another language. And you tell me you're the experts. That's just my personal take on it, but that's how I feel about it.

Maggie Marcus: Two quick things. One is the National Academies of Sciences just put out a beautiful letter to DHS and ICE about the impact of immigration raids at schools and civil rights going back to schools exactly to your point, Angela, of being safe places. And I'll share that link with you as well. I thought it was very well done and just very articulate as far as like this is not good for any student because schools are, you know, places of safety. And then I would the my other piece I was going to say was, I personally do this work for social justice. I think it is a language is a right and I think that Spanish-speaking students in particular, being the second most popular or most widely spoken language in the US, should have access to these programs that are research-based, proven to help them not only maintain their native language but also acquire English. And so I love working with Eric and I'm so glad he's in this position. And I think, I don't know where I was going with that. I was going to say like if Eric were in a different like capacity, I might follow him there too, but my but my heart is really in this idea of these programs being a linguistic right for students. And I think it's great when English speakers, I mean, my girls go to a

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bilingual school, it's great that they can learn Spanish as well, but primarily, I think of it through the social justice lens.

Eric Bethel: You know, we are tremendously lucky to have a partner like Maggie because of that compassion. I know we're on a call and this is audio, but I'm sure Angela, you saw that glimmer in her eye. She does have quite a heart and passion. And that is, you know, dual language schools are small, they're not many, right? We're small, small community. And so we exist in a monolingual education system and it does take the kind of partnership that we have to really create the conditions for our educators and our school leaders to really be their their absolute best for kids and create the kind of community that you both just described.

Angela Kelly: Yeah, it sounds like the two of you have developed this beautiful partnership. And I'm wondering for the listeners out there who may be, this maybe the first time they've had this conversation or they've had it in their heart, they have a social justice, a lot of educators are in it for the social justice aspect of this and for the equity and for just the justice of the empowerment that education provides an individual. What might a principal or a district leader do if they currently don't have this option in their school, but they have students who are coming in with primary languages other than English. What might be some steps they could take or some resources that they could access to give them either more information, connect with one of you or with the foundation, or some actions that they could take that might help students feel more safe, feel more included and to open a conversation up around more equity and more access to the right to education and the celebration of the culture and the language in which they speak.

Eric Bethel: Well, Angela, is just starting at a really, really, really basic level, I think understanding and getting to know your community and your students. I'm just speaking of as if I was a district leader or a school leader is incredibly valuable. And whether you have 14 different spoken languages

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at your schools or just two, understanding that there is language diversity at your school, ensuring that you match and meet that language diversity even if it's learning a greeting, learning a goodbye, learning what someone your student is speaking in your building and just offering that comfort because again, your home language represents and reflective of your identity and if students feel like they're being their their language and their identity is being valued, then they're going to take academic risks, they're going to take social risks, they're going to be their full selves. So I you know, starting at a very basic level there and then, you know, there's there's so many great resources available to support teacher development in language acquisition pedagogy.

And, you know, finding what you have available to you and accessible to you in whatever district or school you're leading or working in is critical and building and figuring out a professional development sort of plan for for your teachers because not everyone, you know, you don't get that in all teacher preparation or teacher training programs. It's something that that you absolutely have to support teachers and teachers want it and you have to create those conditions if you're a principal or a leader.

Angela Kelly: Yes. Those basic elements that can just, one, it's something you can do instantly to help students feel welcomed by greeting them. You don't have to go and immerse yourself in Mexico to learn the language fully to come back and then be the leader. You can just incrementally learn these steps and connect with families too. I think that opening yourself up like you said to the community and just meeting with them, talking with them. And if that requires like hiring interpreters so that you can have this connection and communication and to listen and to understand. We had meetings monthly called ELAC and I loved those meetings because my moms would come and all the kids were there and I would get to not just communicate with them, but I got to see the culture.

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We brought food, we had conversations, we talked about home life, we talked about what homework felt like, we talked about who was working multiple jobs and who needed support before school, after school. So the conversations ended up opening up about so much more than just report cards and, you know, mid-year assessments or something like that. It became about the experience of learning, the experience of education for the family. So I love that you, like anybody can do that. Anyone can offer that and take those little baby steps and celebrating and acknowledging students where they're at right now and where their school is right now, right? If they're not ready to bring on an entire program, we can just start with the acknowledgement of the languages, the acknowledgement of the different cultures in their school. So thank you so much for that.

Maggie Marcus: I was going to say along the funding lens too, since schools never, never have a, there's never enough money in district budgets. And I think one sort of strategic piece could be for and this is work on the school leader or on their team, but is to find out which nonprofit are operating in their in their space. If they already have relationships with nonprofit organizations that are in the teacher professional development space, and then also who are local funders or national funders that are interested in the in the issues that they want to address. I know like in DC, for example, we have a DC Public Education Fund, which is only funds DCPS. So, and that, I know, like Montgomery County in Maryland has one, New York has one. So they're not universal necessarily, but these branches of funding that help district, they're set up really for districts. And so thinking through some of that like strategy or more specific partnership options for funding that that may not be right just through your school budget that that the district is giving you, because some of the work, I think definitely goes above and beyond what the district would be able to do.

Angela Kelly: That's actually really important to know because this might just be a level of awareness where people didn't realize there were agencies out there available to help. Could you speak to the foundation

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specifically that you're working with, which is the Sullivan Foundation, correct? Could you speak to the services they provide and what this foundation is about? Just to give listeners like a background in what this foundation is.

Maggie Marcus: And I will say, it's kind of funny now, but I took this position. I started in 2022, and I remember thinking at the beginning, like very naively, like, well, I'm going to fund DCPS. Like I'm just gonna I'm gonna write them a check. So I was like, why is this so complicated? You know, like this is the work I want to do. How do I pay for it? And it sort of took a little while to learn about the Ed Fund in this case as the financial partner because to really to navigate the bureaucracy of a public school system and making sure that the money goes to where it's supposed to go.

But now we're there. So that's good. So our foundation, it's a private family foundation. It was started by my parents. My parents were the founders of our foundation. And I'm the only employee. I'm the oldest of three children, but the only one that is involved in the family foundation. So luckily for me, because of my passion, I can really focus on what I want to focus on. Of course, we have some family legacy, legacy gifts and things that we do to support interests of my family members, but having written my dissertation on equitable access to dual language programs, I knew I wanted to one, increase the amount of dual language programs so that there's more accessibility in that route for multilingual learners.

And then two, think about the teacher pipelines because we know that we don't have enough teachers to fill the demand for dual language programs. So a lot of our work focuses, I do, I mean, the the bulk of my work is with DC public schools where we're doing this work with the learning labs which Eric can share with you. And then we're doing some work with a nonprofit called Ensemble learning on the secondary programs in DCPS, the secondary dual language programs. We have I think one partner or one, I'm in a funding collaborative with other funders in California. So I do

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some work around the same sort of issues with a group of California funders.

And we do also fund some immigration work in specifically in Mexico, helping a couple organizations. One, the International Rescue Committee and two, a smaller organization called Solidarity Engineering that both address the issues of vulnerable migrant and people on the move communities and supporting them with with basic needs and what they need. And I think about that a lot because I think then to being a teacher and the students that I've had and that Eric sees who made that journey and sort of and trying to think about at that very, at that moment when they're in a very vulnerable position, what can we do to make it a smoother trip and help them navigate, you know, they're fleeing from violence or political circumstances. So that, you know, there's all sorts of reasons and then just so I always think about that connection because then they come and they, you know, a lot of them end up in in our classrooms. But yes, the majority of our work is really DC centered with Eric and his team.

Angela Kelly: Nice. And when you mentioned the teacher pipelines, are you working with universities on developing programming for like incoming teachers who are preparing to become teachers? Eric, do you have sufficient teachers? Do you find that to be a challenge and how might schools across our country, you know, be able to solicit, advertise and attract teachers who are interested in this type of teaching.

Eric Bethel: Angela, you really know the core of our like challenges and where we spend a lot of time thinking and grappling. And it's both of those things. I heard you talk about like teacher development in specific to like language acquisition and dual language and I also heard you talk about talent like where do we find the people? And it's true that dual language programs are so unique and we're a small subset of all the types of school programming that's offered. And one of the the magic benefits of having an

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ally and partner like Maggie in the Sullivan Family Foundation is we are able to in addition to what dual language allocation funds we get, we have the opportunity to design and create and build, be scrappy and create the the kind of professional learning environment we want for principals and for our educators in the classroom. And so, you know, the professional learning piece, we know people don't come in trained. People don't come in with some certification that says I can do dual language instruction. We have to build their capacity and create an environment that does so. And we're doing so in DCPS in partnership with the Sullivan family.

And in terms of like recruitment and selection. So, right, we're looking for bilingual candidates. We're looking for candidates who may have some dual language pedagogy experience. We're looking for leaders that have this kind of experience. And the pipeline and the pool for that is shallow and it requires us to be really resourceful. So we look across the nation in our recruitment and selection. We look internationally for recruitment and selection. And it's not easy, but we've been fortunate enough to build some pipelines and to have some markets that where we can find teachers from, but it's it's scarce and it takes a big, you know, a big part of our our work.

And then Angela, we have to keep them happy and retain them because it's a competitive space, right? When there's a huge demand but not as much. And in the teaching profession in general, right? In general, nationally, I wonder if you've probably have covered this in your many conversations, but, you know, nationally, we're looking at, you know, teacher shortages and trying to attract our smartest and brightest people to a field that, you know, is competing with the tech industry and everything else. So, you know, you can you can multiply that in the dual language community, the challenges.

Maggie Marcus: I was just going to add one thing to that because something that we're doing in addition to the work that Eric and his team are doing with the current teachers and coaches and school leaders is

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we're working with - the National Center for Teacher Residencies in conjunction with Ensemble Learning and then two California funders to develop a teacher, an early childhood bilingual teacher educator pipeline. And so we're hoping we have a couple sites in California and then fingers crossed, one in DC that will really help us see like can we work with the paraeducators that are in the schools, in the communities and build up the skills that they need so that they can be teachers of record. And really thinking through like the community assets and members as opposed to, you know, especially now it's very challenging to recruit internationally. So I think there's, I mean, like Eric said, it's a national issue and and it's it's really once this program gets off the ground, the next phase is like a residency design Academy. We're hoping to have some takeaways from how this could work in other districts and cities or states.

Angela Kelly: This is so brilliant. You know the work that you are doing - now, just hang with me here for a second because I know this like everybody wants the urgent solution. Everybody wants to fill the positions they have right now, but what I want to acknowledge you both for is the work that you're doing now and the brilliance of the programming that you're doing is setting students up to be eligible, to have the desire, to have the passion to then become teachers and college instructors and to promote this and advocate for this and work with foundations and expand the impact that this program will have because the reason it's so difficult or my speculation is that because let's say like I didn't learn a second language growing up, therefore, to have to go and learn it as an adult feels like a lot of effort, a lot of time, like am I going to be as good as if I had learned it when I was.

So there's a lot of barriers or there imposed barriers that that maybe adults have perceived, but as kids are learning this as they go when that brain's flexible and, you know, like they're very resilient to all of the learning and just able to capture it as their identity as a child and then going into adulthood, it will expand the pipeline, it will expand the conversation and

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my hope is that it becomes more mainstream in our schools, that, you know, 10 years from now, 20 years from now when we take a little snapshot, this is the norm, this is the mainstream, that it's a normal and natural part of our public school system because it is actually designed to serve the public, which is all kids in our schools regardless of where you live, the color of your skin, the language that you were born into and the, you know, the cultural identity that is yours to claim.

And the work that you guys are doing now is really setting kids up to become the champions for this type of learning, this type of environment at the schools and I think it's really brilliant and I'm excited to hear that you're tapping into the community. We had so many members of our community that were extremely bright, extremely, you know, capable of teaching and becoming a part of the team, as you would say, in, you know, maybe a more advanced capacity. But allowing that and inviting them in like that's magnificent. It's brilliant.

Maggie Marcus: Yeah, we could give a shout out to there's one of the assistant principals that we work with at CHEC, which is Columbia Heights Educational campus, Evert Diaz, who was a product of a bilingual elementary school in DC and now is a system principal at a dual language middle school. And so I think that's really powerful, right? To have people who are in the community, who went through the school system and see the value of it to then be in leadership positions. So yeah, I hope that we can work to grow those sorts of pathways too with the students as they, you know, go in high school, off to college and things like that.

Angela Kelly: So wonderful. Are there any final words of wisdom, anything you would like to share with our listeners who are eager to learn more, eager to try something, eager to take their school, even if it is already in a program, to take it to the next level? What would you like to share with them?

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Eric Bethel: You know, we continue to try to lift the narrative of dual language instruction because we want to bring attention, resource, community to it. So my final message would be that, you know, dual language education is not simply a language program, but instead it's high impact and advances academic outcomes, it affirms culture, it strengthens community and it really helps the students prepare for a very interconnected world. So happy to talk more. I really appreciate you inviting me on the show. So thank you, Angela.

Angela Kelly: You're so welcome. I feel like this is just the beginning. I feel like we could have hours of conversation on this, but I really want to highlight this episode. I want people if you are interested in this, please share it, share it with your colleagues, share it on your social media platforms because it is, one, I think it's just essential. I think it's like you said, like it's a basic right of all students to have access to this, to have academic content in their language and to merge and to create a culture that isn't two separate cultures in a school, that becomes one culture of the community, a married, a blended version of the community that it isn't separate.

I know sometimes you might have different cultures within a school campus. It's bringing everybody together and also bringing our families in and our staff members in, it just feels so much more cohesive than trying to take students out of the classroom, teach them English, and then plopping them back in and then have them try to catch up. And then these students are wondering where these students were, and these students are wondering what they missed. Like that model, and I've taught in that model and I've led in that model and it felt very just disjointed. So the work that you guys are doing to marry and bring in into one school culture, one student body, one school community, it's hopeful. It's bringing heart and it's bringing the humanity back to teaching and the humanity back to learning. And we get away from the conversations around the test scores and we're talking about how students feel, their student experience, teachers experience,

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and it's a collective experience versus this disjointed, segmented experience. So thank you, thank you, Eric for sharing your wisdom, your experience, your brilliance with our community. And I really invite listeners to share this. Dr. Marcus, any last words of wisdom for the listeners out there?

Maggie Marcus: Yeah. Well, I was just thinking about in some cases, I mean, this is very district dependent and state dependent, but there are some mechanisms if a principal feels like the best way to serve their community would be through a dual language program. There are like Texas has a law, the rule of 20, where if you have 20 students who speak the same language in the same grade level band, you can advocate or petition for a dual language program. And I think in some cases with district, with school leaders I've seen in locally in Arundel County and in Richmond public schools where school leaders say, I think this model's the best for my population.

And so I mention that to think like strategically and think through like if you want to do a dual language program, what are the options available to you like from a policy lens and from a community lens and I love that kind of stuff. So I'd always be happy to be like a brainstorm thought partner on that because I know it's also, there's of course a lot of challenges there, but that's what I love to do. So I would say I would encourage school leaders to really think about if that sort of model might be a good fit for their community.

Angela Kelly: Absolutely. What a beautiful invitation and extension of your, you know, of offering your thoughts and services and expertise. I really believe this conversation is cracking open a new door, a new set of opportunities, a new set of approaches that it might just be a solution that you didn't realize you wanted or were looking for or needed, and it may solve some of the problems that you've been kind of like, you know, banging your head against the wall trying to figure out. Perhaps, you know,

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looking into this approach, researching it, starting with some essentials, reaching out to Maggie or to Eric, it may just be exactly what your school needs. And don't be afraid to explore that because it might be exactly what your kids need, what your community needs, and in a few years from now, you never know the possibilities that could emerge when we start looking into expanding our inclusivity with our community versus trying to find ways to keep it all, you know, separate.

So it's a courageous conversation. I think it's a vulnerable conversation, but I think it's the most loving and empowered conversation that schools can be having, especially during this time and season of the institution of education at large. So thank you both for your time today. I really appreciate this. I know we had an extended conversation, but I appreciate the time and effort that you put into the work that you're doing, the service you're providing to students, staff members, and families. Thank you. Thank you so much.

Maggie Marcus: Well, thanks for having us, Angela. It's really a pleasure to be here with you and with Eric and to share in this conversation. So thank you.

Eric Bethel: Agreed. Thank you.

Angela Kelly: Yes, thank you all. Thank you all. And I look forward to being in touch and talking with you again soon. So there you have it, you guys. Just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to conversations around dual language programming, the value of multi-language programming, and really, it's about culture. It's about creating a culture on your campus that goes beyond just learning another language. So if you're at all interested, we're going to have many resources in the show notes. We'll have contact information. We'll have like website links and such so that you can explore this more on your own. Have a beautiful week everybody. Have an empowered week, and we will talk with you next week. Take good care. Bye.

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