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[Montserrat] Welcome to this four-part podcast series hosted by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of English Language Acquisition, OELA.

We're here with Dr. Amy Heineke, Professor of Bilingual Education at Loyola University in Chicago, and Dr. Kristin Davin, Professor of World Language Education at the University of North Carolina in Charlotte. Today, we will continue to listen to the conversation about the implementation of the Seal of Biliteracy in U.S. schools.

In this final episode of the Seal of Biliteracy podcast series, we will hear from practitioners who will share their experiences with implementing and promoting the Seal of Biliteracy in their educational contexts, and who will answer questions about topics associated with implementation of this credential. We're pleased to introduce Justin Fisk, Director of Multilingual Learning at Adlai E.

Stevenson High School in Lincolnshire, Illinois. Melody Becker, Director of English Learners and Modern Languages at J. Sterling Morton School District in Cicero, Illinois. And Megan Budke, Immersion, Indigenous, and World Language Coordinator at Office of Teaching and Learning at St.

Paul Public Schools in St. Paul, Minnesota. Also, back with us today are Dr. Anna Szuber, Director of English Learner Programs, and Dr. Fabiola Ginski, Director of World Language Programs at the Office of Language and Cultural Education in Chicago Public Schools. Please note that in this podcast, the terms "English learners" and "multilingual learners" are used interchangeably, and refer to the population of students defined as English learners in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended by Every Student Succeeds Act.

Let's get the conversation started.

- [Dr. Davin] Okay. So next we're going to hear from three panelists and these three individuals are doing such amazing work. And we've known them for quite some time now, and done research with them, so I'm excited to introduce them. I'm so just honored that they are joining us today. So the first one is Justin Fisk.

He's the Director of Multilingual Learning at Stevenson High School in the Chicagoland area, in Lincolnshire, Illinois. He facilitated the initial rollout of the Seal of Biliteracy there back in the 2014-2015 school year, and when he wrote a chapter for an edited volume that Amy and I published, over 20% of his students, even back then, at the school were graduating with the Seal of Biliteracy.

So, amazing work. He's done a lot of great work, too, to expand the assessments to less commonly taught and tested languages, to make sure that the students in his very diverse school, over 60 languages represented there, have access to earning a Seal of Biliteracy. So our next panelist is Melody Becker.

She's the Director of English Learners and Modern Languages in Morton School District, in Cicero, Illinois, and this is a really neat district. It's just a small district, with only a couple of high schools, but they graduate one of the highest numbers of students who earn a Seal of Biliteracy. It's predominantly a Latinx district, and they've done really innovative and cool things to get parents involved in promotion, and celebrating the Seal of Biliteracy.

So she does so much work just across her entire district to elevate this policy, and its implementation. And then our third panelist who you'll hear from after that is Megan Budke. She is currently at St. Paul Public Schools in Minnesota. She's the Emerging Indigenous and World Languages Coordinator.

I first met her when she was at Wayzata School District. She launched the Bilingual Seal work in Minnesota, and was part of the team that did that back in 2015, and then she started the Seal program at Wayzata. Since moving to St. Paul Public Schools, she has increased participation in the Seal of Biliteracy

program by almost 100%, and so she just has a lot of really wonderful experiences to share with us, too.

So with that, I'm going to hand it over to Justin.

- Hello. Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you, Kristin, for that kind introduction. So I'll start by giving a little bit more context about our district. So we're north of Chicago. We're a single high school district and we have a few more than 4,600 kids in our district, about 60 home languages, according to our home language survey. And back in 2014-2015, that first year that Illinois started the Seal of Biliteracy, we started with about 16% of our graduates earning recognition either through...

Illinois is a two-tiered system, so a Seal of Biliteracy, or a Commendation toward Biliteracy. The Seal in Illinois is intermediate-high, the Commendation is intermediate-low on the ACTFL proficiency scale. So just that low-hanging fruit initially was just using AP scores, connecting the dots with our state English assessment, which at the time was the ACT and we were able to give 16% of our graduates some recognition.

So that was the easy part. This last year, again I'm happy to say that about 30% of our graduates earned recognition, so the '23 school year, and that was through partnerships, I think is what it comes down to, at the heart of it. So whether that's through assessment, or whether it's through promotion. So talking about assessment, one of the biggest things that we started off from the get-go to expand beyond our world languages, our instructed second languages, was reaching out to some community language schools.

So early on, we established portfolios when there weren't any state-approved tests for Telugu, Lithuanian, Marathi, and Polish. Some of those languages, actually, three of the four now have assessments that are online as approved assessments here in Illinois. Marathi is the only one that does not, so we still have a portfolio for Marathi, and we still have an active cooperative relationship with the BMM Marathi Shala.

So reaching out to these organizations when there has not been an assessment for us to use was one of the early things that we used to promote equity in our

assessment process. I'll also highlight that this past school year, I had a student who wanted to know if there was an option for an assessment in Sanskrit.

And I didn't know where there might be an assessment in Sanskrit, so I reached out to a professor, Dr. Rebecca Manring at IU Bloomington, and she was willing to work with us around that. And I reached out to Illinois State Board of Ed, and we got some preliminary approval for us to use that assessment for a portfolio for Sanskrit, so I'm excited about that. I think being willing to reach out, being willing to bridge those, or build those connections, both locally and at the state level, and even outside of our state lines, I think has been important from an assessment perspective.

Our assessment timing, I know Kristin touched on the timing of assessments, that's evolved over the years as well. We still have two Saturday-based assessments, once in the fall and once in the spring. Just from the sheer numbers of kids who will take it, from a pragmatic and a practical standpoint, we wanted to provide the space for that. We also have for kids that they can take it before or after school, on late arrival days or in field trip days.

So if there's not a way for students to take it on one of those Saturdays, we built in the space for them to do it. Speaking of promotions, early on we saw counselors as one of our key groups to work with in the school. So I think that first year or so, going back to '14-15, it was world language teachers, the teachers who taught those AP classes, and we have six languages here, they were our initial partners in this, but counselors became a very early partner as well.

So to speak specifically to what we do, once a year I'll meet with the 20 or so folks in our student services division who work directly with students. That's in our college and career center. And then to students and individual counselors, I'll talk about updates to the Seal of Biliteracy program. I shared, for example, that we now have the opportunity for Sanskrit this year.

I'll remind them of the rules for implementation, and I'll encourage them to speak to their students. So one thing we'll encourage them to do is all the counselors meet with every sophomore child and parents, and they have access to knowing what the language is in the home language survey, so asking the

students if they might be interested in showing...or in earning recognition for a language they might speak, if it's not one that we instruct here, for example.

In Illinois, we have a bilingual parent advisor committee in our district here. We have what call a multi-level parent advisory committee, because we have four languages. So that's a group of parents that come together once a month, I meet with them, and I work with a few of our colleagues here at the district level, and every year we also talk about the Seal of Biliteracy there.

We also push into the bilingual parent advisor committee for some of the K-8 districts. So Illinois, we have...we're a separate high school district, but we also work in partnership with some of those K-8 districts. I've given presentations about the Seal of Biliteracy there, I'll present in Spanish when I can. The other languages, unfortunately, I don't speak, but we have interpreters for them, certainly. Let's see, I'd say partners, and Amy, you and I were in a meeting just last week, ISBE, so the Illinois State Board of Ed has been an important partner as well.

They elicit feedback, they ask for feedback, and we give it to them as far as ways to improve the program. From a promotional standpoint as well, reaching out to parents at our incoming freshman parent night, which is attended by, oh, gosh, thousands of parents and students every year, we'll highlight the Seal of Biliteracy as an important accomplishment that can be given. Some more concrete things we do, obviously it goes on the transcript here...or I shouldn't say obviously.

But in Illinois, it goes on students' transcripts. It's featured in the bottom-right of students' transcripts, and we also put a big stamp and a seal on the diploma. And what we'll do specifically as a district, we give students a really neat medal that they get to wear when they graduate, and then we include their names in the high school program.

- Thank you so much, Justin. Okay, I'm going to pass it over to Melody next.

- Thank you. Thank you so much. Thanks, Justin, for sharing the context in Illinois. I am also in Illinois district. We are situated just west of Chicago. And like Kristin said, we are a majority Latino school district, and also a high-low-

income school district, and so that context really has impacted our decision-making.

Another thing that is impacting our decision-making is the growth of our English learner population. In 2018, it was 16.7% English learners, and today we're above 32% English learners. We also keep track of our former English learners, and that constitutes a total population of 63%. And so we really, as the Director of English Learners, have been thinking about increasing the status of biliteracy as a district-wide, system-wide approach, which can be very daunting if you're just getting started.

And so my advice is think big, have a big vision for what you are looking to accomplish, but also get started, and get better. It is a long process to institutionalize the Seal of Biliteracy, and by each step, things will become more easier...more easier, easier if you are thinking in that system-wide approach.

Some of the things that we focus on with that system-wide approach is reducing barriers, integrating the process into classes, and creating systems. So something that is important for our district's success, which this past year we honored 45% of our graduates with the Seal of Biliteracy, or the Commendation towards Biliteracy.

We started in 2016 with about 20%. Some of the things that we do to reduce the barriers is the district has always paid for the tests. So the students don't have to apply, there's not, you know, a bottleneck for them to get to be able to participate.

We also allow for retakes. So if students are getting started with the test, we have used mostly the AAPPL test for Spanish and English, as well as the other standardized tests that are available as the requirements on the ISBE website. But we're also testing out the SAMPLE test this year, as it has become a little bit more cost-effective, and that test also has a monolingual Spanish exam.

And we will allow for retakes in all of those options. We think that that's very important, for students to be able to get a better idea of what the test is and

show their growth. We also work very hard to integrate the Seal of Biliteracy into our classes.

Right now, we had some of our senior English teachers really push for a school-wide approach for the Seal of Biliteracy, and so we this year gave the opportunity for over a thousand students to have a one-day in-school field trip to have access to the Seal of Biliteracy over the course of seven days in October.

And now we're working on inviting students back to finish up the test, or do any retakes that they need. Our testing window is between October 1st and April 1st because we, like Justin said, use the graduation ceremony as a really awesome way to celebrate the students. We do the same things that he mentioned, and instead of a medal, we offer a pin, and the students wear cords at the ceremony as well.

In terms of communication, we also think of this in a system-wide approach. Our school has an outreach team, and they help us to make flyers that are visually pleasing and accessible in Spanish and English, as those are our majority languages. We have a solid space on social media, and we use, like, regular picture-taking and documentation of our big celebrations.

Sorry, I'm at school. The bell rang. We also really depend on our principals to send out a positive message. They have a, you know, strong respect from the students and staff, and when they're talking about how important and proud they are of our students' linguistic skills, that really sends a strong message that this is important, it's worth taking time for an in-school field trip, and that really helps us move things forward.

And so we use our regular modes of communications. The principals send out weekly emails, and we send updates through there with the Seal of Biliteracy. We have a community magazine called "The Morton Connection," that we also send out celebrations and updates.

And one of the things that we are sure to include is those things about how universities are offering college credits, and some student spotlights, where they

go for job interviews at an entry level position, and get offered something higher paying or more responsibility because they are bilingual.

For us, something... We have a lot of students who are also taking the ACCESS test. So something that our district has is assessment laptops that we use strictly for assessments. And in that way, we maintain their battery life, and that they're not broken or malfunctioning in any way, and then if there's any updates, they're networked together so that all those updates are all pushed out at the same time.

So each of our buildings has 150 laptops on-site, and we can move them across the buildings if we need more at each. They also have headsets that go with those assessment laptops. They're not used any other time other than assessments. So the last thing to mention is we are really sending the message that being bilingual is important, and that we thank the parents for their funds of knowledge, and the work that they've done with their students.

And so we have a large family engagement effort called Universidad de la Comunidad, and the idea there is that both students, parents, and teachers are interacting together. Everybody has something to offer, and expertise for us to learn from, and so we're trying to create an environment where we see and value the contributions of each different group, and have a space for us to all learn together.

And we use that to also leverage the Seal of Biliteracy, as a place for people to learn about it, and also to celebrate the efforts towards that accomplishment. Thank you so much for your time.

- All right. Thank you so much, Melody. Gosh, I'm just taking so many notes during all of these. You all are so wonderful. I'm going to hand it over to Megan now.

- [Megan] So I'm not in Illinois, I'm in Minnesota, and our Bilingual Seal was written into law, and it requires students to test in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. And as they mentioned, we also award college credit at our Minnesota State colleges and universities, too. And so upon implementation in

2015, there actually were no assessments in languages such as Somali, Karen, Hmong, and these are some of our top-spoken languages here in Minnesota.

So our Minnesota Department of Education actually partnered with ACTFL, and they trained groups of heritage language speakers on how to make proficiency assessments, and then evaluate student work. And so these assessments were then distributed to students in various districts. Sometimes the kids completed them on paper, sometimes a school would put them on their learning management system, and then the trained raters would evaluate student work, and those results were shared with districts.

As time has gone on, we've kind of moved to a more streamlined system, and now, most of those, if not all of those tests are really facilitated by outside vendors. So our state uses the vendor called Extempore, and Extempore facilitates the state-developed components of our tests, and then we combine them with readily available assessments such as the STAMP WorldSpeak, which is available in many of the less commonly taught languages.

So to date, Minnesota offers testing in all 4 domains in 30 different languages, and that includes their state-developed assessments for 12 of those languages. And I really want to thank Ursula Lentz and Ayumi Stockman, who were our state world language specialists, who really took the lead in designing those proficiency assessments in our less commonly taught languages.

In our own district, now I'm working in St Paul Public Schools, we've been working really hard on the promotions area. So our research, evaluation, and assessment department created a data dashboard with all of our Bilingual Seal data from 2022, and then again from 2023. And what's really unique about our dashboard is that it not only displays data that you would typically expect, such as how many students signed up, what languages they signed up in, and what level of award they earned, but the dashboard is adaptive.

So when I click on a language like Hmong, I see all the data for any student who signed up to take a test in Hmong. And that includes demographic data. So I can see things like race, gender, EL status, grade level. I can even see this year if they were an immersion student or not. So when we looked at this data, we noticed that a lot of our heritage language learners were not signing up for a

testing experience at the same rate of the students who were in a language program.

So as part of our promotions work, we met with all of our district bilingual cultural liaisons, and we made a culturally responsive communication plan for each of those languages that our cultural liaisons support. We went to parent advisory council meetings as well in Spanish, Karen, and Somali. We send text messages or robocalls to families in their language when registration is available.

We also made a video that features our Bilingual Seal award winners, and we asked schools to play that in advisory classes last year. And we saw a 23% increase in our student registration the following year, including large increases in our heritage languages, particularly Karen, Oromo, and Amharic.

We also observed in our data dashboard that our heritage language learners in previous years were not achieving awards at the same level as kids who were enrolled in a language program, so we've been working on programming decisions. So this year, we launched language courses in Karen.

Karen is a language that is spoken in Burma, now we call it Myanmar, and we believe we're the first district who offers Karen language courses in a public school since 1962 in Burma. We have Somali courses in development that we're set to be offering those next year to students. And we have high schools that actually use the data dashboard to make a difference, too.

One of our high schools has a population that is 50% Hmong, but when we looked at their data, we saw less than 10 students a year were signing up to complete a test in Hmong. And so when the principal asked about this, I shared with him and I said, well, students who are in a language program earn the most and the highest awards, and his current language offerings at that time were in Spanish and French.

So that year, he added Hmong to the course registration guide, and this year, he has a full-time Hmong teacher, and 174 students are enrolled in the course. And all this work, in our mind, kind of contributes to promotions because we know

when kids are in a language class, they are more likely to sign up for a testing opportunity.

So by making those heritage language course decisions, we have direct access to students to encourage them to sign up, and we can even embed a testing opportunity right into the class. So our data dashboard has really given us a critical lens on equity, and we see the Bilingual Seal and that 5P framework similarly as Kristen and Amy. It's like an instrumental piece on changing policy, practice, and your language program.

So we're super excited to keep watching our data, and get to our ultimate goal, which is we want to honor all the kids for their multilingual assets.

- Thank you all so much. I think all of those were just such great kind of examples of things that you all can do in your own local settings, or be thinking about, particularly focused on proficiency assessments and promotion, but also contributing very broadly to Seal of Biliteracy efforts, particularly with a lens on equity, which is what we're always focusing on. But this is meant to be multilingualism for all, right?

Particularly for our students who bring such rich strengths into the classroom, so thank you. All right. So we are going to move into Q&A right now, and I'm really excited to have... We've got Justin and Melody and Megan, but we also have Drs. Ginski and Szuber from Chicago Public Schools. So we've got four incredible districts, two smaller suburban districts, two large urban districts, lots of expertise to share across the board.

Students who have IEPs, and making sure that there's equitable opportunities for students who have been labeled as having disabilities, to be able to demonstrate their biliteracy. So if any of you want to jump in, and think through that, some of the things your district has thought about with that.

- So this is an area that we are still growing in. This past year, we have several students who are on track for the Seal of Biliteracy, and use a resource teacher to help them be successful. In doing that, we are improving our communication between the two efforts to make sure that students have access to the resource

teacher, and it's on a schedule so that it's not a surprise to either the testor, or the staff member that's helping out.

- Thanks, Melody. Anyone else?

- [Dr. Szuber] I'll jump in really quickly. I think one of the challenges for us is that we have the same criteria for students to be eligible for the Seal in our state, regardless of whether or not they have an IEP, or if they have a disability. So that's a big challenge for us. And I know a lot of people on this call have been in a meeting with our state board last week where we're talking through these, because any changes necessary would have to come from the state.

So as districts, we're advocating for changes and flexibility that way. On our end, I think the best thing we can do for now is just really honoring providing accommodations. All the state assessments that we're using are not timed, so not only students can take as long as they need, we also talk with individual school coordinators, students can take a test in one domain a day.

They don't have to take the full test on the same day. And there's also each assessment has built-in accommodations that are available. So we try to just share that information with schools to make them aware because sometimes they're not aware that those accommodations exist.

- For those of you who are in K-8 contexts, and are implementing Pathway recognitions, or are thinking about implementing Pathway recognitions, there's often more flexibility with Pathway recognitions because it's not codified in state law or code. So I've talked to folks in K through 8 settings who have been a little bit more flexible with students with IEPs in the Pathway stages, right?

So if a student has a disability in reading, for example, they might just do speaking and listening to kind of, again, give that encouragement to continue biliteracy development because they have that flexibility in early stages. Justin, go ahead.

- I'll just add very quickly, many of the exams, so STAMP and AAPPL have no time limit, and that's been something that we really lean into that, so we let the kids take as long as they need to when they're testing. We also have a student who is hard of hearing, and we reached out to our state board of ed, and we got

an exemption for that student to have to complete the speaking or listening. So being in that partnership with the state was important there, to advocate for that student.

- Excellent. Thank you. I'm going to go on to the next question. So the question is, you know, many folks on the call, including panelists, are from WIDA states, and I think even in non-WIDA states you can make this connection with whatever the required English language proficiency assessment is. So the question is, how do we navigate students that have not shown proficiency in ACCESS, but are taking advanced classes and are obviously proficient in English?

Do any of your districts approve students that have not shown proficiency with ACCESS? And I know we have answers to this from the crew there, so whoever wants to get us started.

- I can speak quickly to what we do. We actually look at the ACCESS scores, and we work with our data team. So when we get students who are juniors, we pull the ACCESS scores. In Illinois, you can earn a commendation if you earn a 3.5 in literacy, so we automatically connect the dots there from our data team, and get those on the students' transcripts.

For those students who show the 3.5 but not the 4.8, which is for reclassification here in Illinois, we do offer them the AAPPL exam in English, which we've seen students are able to get that more easily. And we'll reach out to the kids in the classrooms, work with our ELD teachers, work with the counselors to make sure the students are aware of that opportunity.

- I'll just jump in quickly. For us, similarly, we do offer students a chance to take the STAMP in English. And the other criteria that we've taken advantage of the last couple years in our state is grades that students earn from dual-credit enrollment courses. So if there are seniors undertaking college-level courses, we look at their grades, and based on their GPA for those courses, they can also meet the English criteria.

- Any other panelists? I think those are great examples. And we've seen that across the country, that a lot of times, whether it's, you know, sometimes the

English proficiency measure is like the SAT or ACT, which we know measures a lot more than English proficiency, sometimes it's ACCESS or something like that. There's usually multiple approved data points within states, and so kind of doing some of that flexible and creative assessment, like the AAPPL or the STAMP English can be really effective to kind of extend access.

All right. Next question for the good of the group, funding. So in most, I think almost every district here, and in most districts that Kristin and I talk to, assessments are paid for by the district. We know that funds don't come from the federal government, and in almost all contexts, funds don't come from the state, so it comes from the local setting.

So what are your suggestions to participants to secure that all-important funding to be able to cover assessments for students?

- For us at Morton, it started out by having meetings with our superintendent and the principals, and talking about the benefits of the Seal of Biliteracy, and the opportunity that it had for us to shine a very positive light on our district. And from the very beginning, we had that support, and as we've continued to grow, we've maintained a budget point.

I am a district administrator, and so I manage the budget for the English learners and modern languages department, and each year we have a meeting with the business office where we predict what the costs within the department are going to be, and this is one of those. And so our budget line has been increasing as we've increased access across the years.

- I'll just add on quickly that we also include a report, and so I'll put a table that I send to our board of ed in our interview report so they can track how our Seal of Biliteracy recognition rates have been growing over the years.

And when they see that actively, they feel much more open in opening up their wallets to help support that.

- Yeah, use that data, like Megan talked about, right? Data gets those wallets open. Thank you, Justin. Megan, go ahead.

- I was just going to add we also budget for it as well, and then we use our data to kind of track how we're spending our funding, and what kind of rewards students are getting. But then I'll also add just, like, there's a lot of unique grant opportunities you can pursue. Like we use the FACE grant to help pay for some of the French assessments, we have a Chinese grant in our state that we use for our Chinese assessments. The vendor that we use for our Minnesota State developed assessments, Extempore, actually just partnered with one of our model community language organizations, and got a two-year grant, so all the assessments and less commonly taught languages are now free in Minnesota.

So it's just really interesting about which opportunities come up, and you've just got to always keep your eyes out for it.

- Awesome. That's amazing. Thank you for that. Thank you all for that. The Seal of Biliteracy is really exciting. It's shown to have some really amazing impacts on language education numbers, on students developing biliteracy, and students', you know, cultural linguistic identities, things like that. But because this is...you know, the Seal of Biliteracy came to be through these grassroots efforts, oftentimes, we see district and school folks like yourself who are here trying to figure this all out on their own.

And so when we put our...when we developed the text that we've been referring to, or the 5P framework throughout, that was one of our goals, was kind of putting what we've learned into one place. I think this work is going to continue. One of the things we've been talking about with OELA is about putting together, like, a white paper of best practices at the different layers. So, you know, some of the things that Megan just talked about going on in Minnesota, and we talked last time about the things going on in Washington, some really cool things around assessment of less commonly taught languages that other states can learn from, right?

Looking at states like Illinois and Minnesota, who attach this to college credit, which goes a long way for promotion. And so looking at the state level, looking also at the district level, and at some of those things that you all have learned, that you heard your panelists speak so wonderfully to today, like the data dashboards, and the parent university, and all of those things, like, continuing to

add to those, like, lists of best practices so we all don't have to try to do this work on our own.

We also have research going on right now about Pathway recognitions, which we've talked about here and there throughout the last two sessions, to really weave this work into K through 8 settings, as well as thinking about the implications for higher education, and ways that we can make that connection between K-12 settings doing the Seal work, and also the Seal work that's going on at university levels.

But Kristin and I just want to thank you all so much, thank OELA for this opportunity, thank our incredible panelists, who again, we've learned so much from. You all can see why, because I'm sure you all learned so much from them. But they all are very busy, and taking the time to come and share that expertise with us. And then thanking all of you for being here, and for doing the work that you do.

- This concludes our podcast series on the implementation of the Seal of Biliteracy in U.S. schools. A big thank you to our panelists for discussing this important topic. The information, reflections, and experiences that you shared today will certainly help educators support this population of students.

You have given us many useful ideas to think about as we continue to serve English and multilingual learners across the country. For more information on this topic and other related topics, we encourage you to visit the NCELA website at www.ncela.ed.gov, and check out the many educator resources available there.

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