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Host: Welcome to the second part of this podcast hosted by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of English Language Acquisition, OELA. In this episode, we will continue addressing the impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on the experiences and academic achievement of English learners, and the post-pandemic support for English learners and their educators

I am once again pleased to introduce our panelists. Amaya Garcia is the Director of PreK-12 Research and Practice Education Policy Program at New America. Dr. Karen Thompson is an Associate Professor in the College of Education at Oregon State University. Dr. Kelsey Krausen is the Director of the Strategic Resource Allocation and Systems Planning team at WestEd. Dr. Megan Hopkins is an associate professor in the Department of Education Studies at the University of California, San Diego. And Samuel Klein is the Supervisor of the Office of English Learners in Arlington Public Schools, in Virginia.

In this episode, Dr. Kelsey Krausen will report on the use of ESSER funds, and other fiscal considerations for English learner support. Dr. Megan Hopkins will talk about the considerations for leadership that promotes English learners' equity in the post-pandemic context. And Sam Klein will discuss Arlington Public Schools' journey towards recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, and the impact on English learners' experiences and academic achievement.

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. Kelsey Krausen: Thank you. So I'm Kelsey Krausen, Director of the Strategic Resource Planning Team at WestEd, and I'm going to share just a little bit about how ESSER funds are being used to accelerate learning, and support English learners.

So first, just a little bit of context. As many are aware, Congress quickly acted in March 2020, and then through two other subsequent funding packages, to support education systems across the country, with \$190 billion, approximately, in funding. And there were sort of three main purposes for those funds, to support the safe reopening of schools, to accelerate student learning, and also to provide an opportunity to better support students across systems, so some support for system transformation.

I'm going to be focusing today on the \$20 billion in ESSER funding provided for California. We looked at publicly available expenditure data for California, as well as demographic data to get a sense of how funds were used to support English learners. Those ESSER funds presented...there was a lot of flexibility, a wide range of allowable uses, so districts could really use their discretion to meet the needs that they saw as most urgent in their systems.

And as I mentioned, we are focusing on California in this presentation because there, unfortunately, are big gaps in data, and our ability to look at data across the country, because of differences in the way that data has been reported. So it doesn't allow us, currently, to provide a comprehensive picture of exactly how ESSER funds have been used to support English learners, as well as other student groups.

So in California, not only did the state receive this, you know, \$20 billion in ESSER funds, but they also invested additional state one-time or short-term funding to support learning recovery in the state. And so in doing so, have created a bit of what we refer to as a fiscal staircase for LEAs, and also expanded the period of time that the funds are available. ESSER funds last about five years, and here we can see that with the addition of state funds, the staircase is about nine years of funding for school districts across the state. And

those additional funds also came with a lot of allowable uses, for districts to use in the way to best meet their student needs.

I'm going to dig into the use of ESSER III funds. Those are the last tranche of federal relief aid that are available, and must be obligated by September of 2024. We looked at the data reporting categories in California. What you can see here is that most of the expenditures have been spent on addressing learning loss. So 20% of funds needed to be used to address learning loss, and we see that on average, districts spent about a third of their ESSER III to address learning loss.

And the second largest category is one we think is worth keeping a close eye on, which is activities that are necessary to maintain operations and continuity of services. So that very much aligns with those sort of ongoing needs of our LEAs across the states, so this is a place where we imagine that the expenditures will need to roll over onto ongoing sources of funding. We divided up LEAs across the state to see if there were differences between those districts serving more or less English learners, and what we found is that districts with more ELs spent more on their school facility repairs with those ESSER III funds, and less on educational technology than districts with few ELs.

So it may be that those districts that serve many English learners had unmet school repair issues that predated the pandemic, less access to available funding in those districts that were able to make those needed repairs, as well as investments in facilities infrastructure, but they spent nearly twice as much on school repairs as those districts with the fewest ELs. But once again, we see that the largest category of spending is on addressing learning loss and learning recovery, across all districts, regardless of the proportion of English learners that are being served.

We also think it's really important to look at the remaining ESSER funds. So these expenditure data are from December reports, they were released in January, so already we know that LEAs have continued to spend and obligate their ESSER III funds. But this shows that school districts and county offices of education, of the 931 of them here, one in five were reporting that they had

spent less than half of their ESSER III funds as of December. So why it's important is that we want to be careful to provide additional support and scaffolding for those districts who may need to spend more of their funds in this last year because it sets them up potentially for a fiscal cliff, as those funds are no longer available.

Furthermore, we looked across districts serving more or less ELs to see, again to see how much of those ESSER III funds are left to spend, and we found that districts serving many English learners have the most ESSER funds left to spend. So again, this is a concern because of this potential to set up a fiscal cliff. And I think it's important to note here too, that this is not to say that those districts are doing something wrong by not spending their funds. There were many challenges that school districts have faced in obligating these funds, staffing shortages, particularly in some of our rural communities, as well as supply chain issues. So a number of different issues have impacted in different ways our district's ability to expend funds as well. Regardless, it equates to about \$1,000 per pupil left to spend, so funding that can be put to really important use to support learning for our English learners in our systems.

Okay, some implications. As resources become more constrained in our system with the end of ESSER funding, just a real need to continue to focus on those students who are furthest from opportunity, including our English learners, and to center decisions around how to use funds in student needs, in our data. So to really deeply understand needs in the system, and align resources with those needs. There's also a real opportunity here to do some learning about the ways in which ESSER dollars have been used at the local level, and where those ESSER dollars have made the greatest impact on student learning and well-being, and which of those investments should be sustained for our English learners.

So we sometimes hear that data...there isn't the right data, or the data is not available at the right time. So we really want to encourage our local and state leaders to really consider the full range of data available, formative assessments, discussions with teachers and communities about their priorities, and having those discussions with full transparency about the availability of

resources, the constrained resources available, so that our communities can help us prioritize resource use moving forward.

And then finally, the work that we and many others have been doing is really helping support districts to develop a fiscal staircase, and avoid a fiscal cliff, because of the importance of remaining fiscally stable so that we can continue to support English learners as effectively as possible, as ESSER funds wind down.

And with that, I will turn it over to Dr. Megan Hopkins.

Dr. Megan Hopkins: Hi, everyone. It's wonderful to be here with you today.

So far we've kind of talked about what are some of the key levers and ways in which English learners could be supported post-pandemic, or supported during the pandemic, and many of those levers and practices and funding mechanisms really necessitate leadership for English learner equity. And so my presentation today will focus on what can leaders do...what did leaders do during the pandemic that helped continue to center English learners in their work, and what can leaders do from now into the future.

And when I say leaders, I mean really, many different things. I mean educators at the local level, both at the school and district level, as well as the state level. But even teachers within their context can think about enacting these practices that I'll discuss today.

So as many of you likely experienced, the COVID-19 pandemic really further fractured a siloed system for English learner students, educators, families, and programs. These individuals and programs often tend to exist in silos that are separate from, or potentially an afterthought to the core curriculum, the core instructional program, or even core instructional policies at the local and state level. These organizational conditions tended to exacerbate inequities during COVID-19, as leaders had to make quick decisions about remote and hybrid learning, how to assess students, how to engage families, how to allocate funds. And so we saw in places that where the separation was evident, and where these silos were present, they continued during this time. And so we want to think

about how do we move systems away from this siloed approach, to transformation.

Older conceptions of leadership, or predominant conceptions of leadership might have us consider the behaviors of an individual, and how problems are located within individuals. You know, we often locate policies centered on teachers, and changing teachers' practices, without consideration for those broader systems. So traditional mechanisms that leaders have used is to locate sort of the problems in individuals, and have more of a deficit articulation of those problems, and moving to more transformational equitable leadership requires that practices are distributed among staff members, and include multiple interest holders, so not just teachers and leaders, but parents and community members, and professional staff within schools. And again, shifting from a focus on individual deficits, to considering structural and systemic conditions, and how those might perpetuate social inequities in moving systems toward equity.

And when we think about transformational English learner leadership, these kind of four practices emerged from my ongoing research in this space, working at the school, district, and state level, to consider what are those practices that leaders use and lean into in order to transform their systems for English learner equity. And undergirding all of the practices is an overarching practice promoting asset orientations. There's also an ethos of shared responsibility. And those two kind of core practices are enabled by a robust understanding of English learner policy and practice from civil rights law, to federal policy, to state and local law, and instructional practice, and also the regular practice of evidence use, as Kelsey was encouraging, also multiple forms of evidence to really understand the system's conditions, and how to address them.

So today I'll talk about asset orientation and shared responsibility as two primary practices that leaders used during the pandemic, and also continue to use. So when we think about asset orientations, I'm sure that I'm speaking to the choir here, but when we think about what that means, that means shifting from an emphasis on the linguistic and cultural potential deficits, viewing language as a problem, toward notions of viewing students' linguistic assets and

giftedness as strengths to be leveraged in schools and classrooms. Also, less than focusing on individual students and families as potentially the issue or the challenge to address, shifting and thinking about how can asset orientations be placed through our structures, our systems, and the way that we build capacity.

So leaders who have worked to shift perspectives toward asset orientations engage in some of these practices. They examine data to identify and acknowledge inequities. They also use data to examine kind of the lack of access, resources, and opportunities that might be prevalent in their systems, and also to look at academic and linguistic outcomes. So a first component is to identify where those inequities lie, and examine their potential root causes. So again, using that practice of evidence use to move their systems, and identify where those policy levers would be most beneficial.

They also invoke policy and guidance to gain consensus on minimum requirements, and beyond. So developing, and this connects to the third point, leveraging the evidence base to develop shared understandings of high-quality English learner instruction. So they use policy in order to gain consensus on what is needed, what an English learner program looks like, and then they leverage that evidence to develop shared understandings of what the instruction within those programs needs to look like.

And then, once they've identified some of those levers, some of those challenges and root causes, they then design their systems to message expectations, that they have to make every attempt, even during these very challenging times, to meet English learners' needs at a federal level, as well as a civil rights level. So maintaining those expectations throughout any time period, in the context of any kind of resource allocation. And some states and local districts are also developing specific English learner frameworks that must be considered across all areas of an agency's work, so embedding those asset orientations throughout a department, beyond just the English learner staff.

So we saw that in states and districts that engage these types of practices, and had well-articulated asset-based visions for English learner education that were instantiated in their structures and systems, during COVID, their leaders were more likely to prioritize English learners when schools returned to in-person

instruction, so English learners were among the first to return. They often supported the rapid development or modification of resources to ensure the continuity of instructional supports. So for example, they quickly created lesson plan templates or model lessons for ELD, and content instruction, and they provided staff specific days to do that before they went into remote instruction environments, so that they could be ready with those resources.

They also gathered multiple forms of data, and looked across data points. They accelerated outreach to English learner families and community organizations. Those were often the first people and interest holders that they engaged with in figuring out how to be responsive during that time.

So turning to shared responsibility, we often talk about shared responsibility as collaboration between English learner and content teachers. In my work, we've seen that shared responsibility at a systems level necessitates collaboration between teachers, leaders, and families, so diverse interest holders. It's also often thought of as a shared mindset toward English learner education. And in my work, we've found that it needs to be instantiated not just in mindsets, but also in cultural norms, and within institutional structures.

Some ways in which schools, districts, and states have organized for this ethos of shared responsibility is by including English learner staff in cabinet-level meetings, leadership activities, and decision-making, so that could be at the school district or state level, by embedding English learner-related content in all professional learning activities, including staff meetings, designing structures, and allocating dedicated time for collaborative planning and curriculum development, designating a specific community engagement team that includes diverse staff and family members to design supports. Then it also includes supports and resources for staff, like family liaisons.

They also coordinate language acquisition teams to include English learner teachers, content teachers, and special educators. This is particularly important for dually-identified students, and something that we saw during the pandemic was really critical for ensuring that those supports were streamlined, and not bifurcated across kind of multiple teachers and times for students. A state leader talked about how the English learner staff member was on the cabinet and on

the senior leadership team, so she was constantly carving out space for English learners in ways that didn't happen before they held that position, and that helped them gain influence in those spaces, and promote shared responsibility across their organization.

A district leader talked about during the pandemic, setting aside days where their English learner coaches worked with the content team to develop lesson plans and resources. And then, they were modeled to the rest of the staff, and they gathered feedback, and then, that feedback was used to adapt units in response to what was needed. And so there was a team that was really responsible for thinking about how to create instructional opportunities for English learners across these diverse learning contexts during the pandemic.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we saw that in states and districts that did many of these things, leaders were more likely to carve out specific time for teachers to collaborate, and also to connect with counselors, to allocate funds to support those family liaisons, and other communication resources for English learner families. They designated time for planning, professional learning, and resource development. They reached out to community organizations, and they created explicit mechanisms for staff to communicate their needs, and identify supports in this space.

So overall, as was mentioned by Amaya in the first presentation, state and local education agencies that prioritized English learners tended to continue to do so during the pandemic, and the systems that already centered English learners in their mindsets, norms, and structures could be more responsive and nimbler during that turbulent time, which really demonstrates the need for leadership to promote asset orientations, and an ethos of shared responsibility at different levels of the education system so that we can be that responsive moving forward. And that also, knowledge of English learner policy and practice, and the use of evidence were key levers to support those systemic changes.

And now we have the great opportunity to hear from a local leader who will touch on many of these ideas in his presentation.

Samuel Klein: Great. Thanks so much, Megan. And first of all, I want to thank OELA and NCELA for providing all of us with this opportunity, but also,

OELA and NCELA have done such great work during the pandemic, and after, supporting all of us as practitioners, so thank you for your work.

So I'm Sam Klein, and I am from Arlington, Virginia. We are a school district just outside of Washington, D.C. We have about 5,600 English learners. So what I'm hoping is to give you kind of a sense of what everyone said at the national level, what that looked like at the local level.

What's really interesting is as I was listening to Amaya's presentation, and then just Megan's, there are so many things where I could say, oh, that's exactly us, oh, that was us, that was us, too. Almost everything that they found nationally I think we had some sense of here in Arlington Public Schools as well.

Just to give you a little context, we have about 28,000 students here in Arlington, and an EL enrollment of about 5,600, so we're at about 20%. We service the students through all of our 41 schools and sites, with about 220 English learner teachers. But we also have additional staff, and you're going to hear me mention our bilingual family specialists, which I might call BFSs, and our English learner counselors, who really, they work in Arlington at our secondary level, with middle school and high school, focusing specifically on trauma, reunification, and acculturation for students, and they had a tremendous impact during COVID.

So what I'd like to do is talk a little bit about COVID, and then kind of where we're going from there. So taking a look at COVID, you know, I think in the first couple of months, we kept getting reports that 97% of our students in Arlington Public Schools were connected through wifi. Of course, in my mind, like you might be thinking, okay, that's 3%, I'm not great at math, but that's probably about 850 kids who aren't. I wonder if any of those were ELs? And so I have to say, I feel very proud that our school division worked so hard to get 97%. I do wonder about the other students. But I think it was Amaya, she talked about teachers being on sidewalks. We had a great story of a teacher actually went on the patio, through a screen door, and taught a kindergartner who needed support.

And so we heard a lot of stories like that, but what I will say honestly is I think that online learning environment really is not conducive to success for all, for

students who are learning language and content in tandem. You know, I hate to break it to folks, you all know the answer to this, but really, it was difficult for our students in many cases. I was glad to see in that national data that the productive skills were kept up, but I do think overall it was really, really difficult, and it was just not conducive to acquiring language and content attainment.

We know that for our students also, they had a lot of additional obligations, whether that was babysitting other children in their home, or possibly in the neighborhood, and for our older students, we heard a lot of students, once they were able to go back to work, needed to get as many hours in their jobs as possible to make up for lost time. So kind of I thought of the entire recipe of COVID as when you added the trauma that some of our students had occurred in their journey here to the United States, plus issues around acculturation, reunification with possibly families they haven't seen in years, then you added on, on top of that, a pandemic, it really was stressful and traumatic, and just increasingly difficult for them to not have raised effective filters and for them to concentrate on their learning and their academic goals.

I mean, it's almost like Maslow's hierarchy. You know, we all wanted our students to focus on their health and safety first, and knowing that education might not be in that bottom tier, but as they moved up and felt more comfortable and more safe, hopefully they were able to get as much education as possible.

Taking a look at our data, so we saw a huge increase in chronic absenteeism, and that includes the year that, you know, for the most part, students were home. But even as we've come back, we've had issues with chronic absenteeism, and that's not just ELs, but I'm talking specifically about ELs. I know our scores in math, science, reading all went down, specifically science, and when we really delved into why, and especially talking to teachers, and later students, you know, not having hands-on opportunities to do the work made it very, very difficult.

And of course, our progress in proficiency also took a big hit, and we're going to talk about proficiency in a minute, but the progress was difficult to track.

And I think Amaya had mentioned too, that the whole idea of assessments were difficult. So while we did very well that first March in completing our English language proficiency assessments, the following year was much harder, which meant we weren't able to track progress as easily.

Now, when you move to the 23-24 school year, our chronic absenteeism has decreased since the worst part of the pandemic, our scores have improved quite a bit, double digits on average, and our EL progress has gone up 16.2%. What hasn't really taken that jump back would be the students reaching proficiency. You know, I talk about the stair-step effect on data. You know, you want it to move up, and each year we go up a little bit, so it does look like a stair-step. We're hoping to be back at the pre-pandemic level very soon, if not already.

So kind of that was a look back at what happened with the data. Where are we now? So moving forward, we have really focused on that whole concept that got mentioned earlier today, the shared responsibility. And that's really important. In fact, in the center here I have EL's access with their peers, but really it should say shared responsibility. I know Dr. Hopkins talked about shared responsibility, and we talk about it all the time, and what that really comes to is all teachers in the building are EL teachers. They might not be certified in EL, but they're all working with English learners. Whether it's a third grade teacher, a biology teacher, or a seventh grade social studies teacher, they're likely, in Arlington, to have ELs in their classroom.

So we have spent a huge amount of time working with our general education teachers, specifically secondary four core teachers in the last three years to get them trained on best practices for English learners. The four core meaning the mathematics, science, social studies, and English language arts. We really have been focusing with them on the integration of language and content, specifically saying we'd like to know when we walk into your classroom, what are your language goals, what are your content goals, and then seeing them in action.

In addition, we continue, especially with our English learner counselors and our bilingual family specialists, really working on the social-emotional support, and that's really the family support. Because again, that Maslow, we have students who are still in need. Students are constantly coming, and they're bringing new

issues, and making sure that we're able to support them in a variety of ways, really the whole child, not just academically, but support them in their pathway to graduation, as well as their social-emotional needs.

We are also targeting, of course, we have students who are students with limited or have interrupted formal education, or SLEIF, and we have newcomers. And so making sure that we want our newcomers in our sites to have that full experience of English language learning, but also have access to the gen ed setting, and access to things like extracurricular activities, really making sure that they're a big part of the community, that's a huge push for us.

And with this comes access to rigorous instruction. Of course, all of our students have access not only to English language arts, but English language development, in addition to mathematics, social studies, and science, but we're looking at a new progression, with a target being that we want students in high school to have opportunities to earn their credits as soon as possible. And that would be credits in English, mathematics, social studies, science, towards graduation, and helping them see the importance of really buckling down right from the very start, attaining English as quickly as possible, and focusing on credits or classes for credit. We want them to graduate. And a big part of that is that we've been providing this training to our secondary core content teachers with the idea that they're going to have ELs in their classroom.

I think one of the things we constantly talk about is we want to see rigor and high expectations for all ELs, whether it's levels 1, 2, 3, or 4, and we also want to see the support. We want to see what supports are provided in order to have the students be able to reach those high expectations. We can't say enough how important to have both the rigor and the support is.

All ELs are not the same. You know, if you've ever met me, you've heard me say this. Sometimes we think of ELs as a homogenous group. You'll hear students referred to, "the group of ELs." Well, calling them a group of ELs, all ELs being the same, is like saying everybody in this session right now who has glasses are the same. Because the only thing we might have in common are glasses, just like the thing that the ELs might have in common is that they're still attaining English. So it's just a friendly reminder, and we'd like to talk to

our teachers about this, we'd like to talk to our administrators, and this is a friendly reminder for all of you as practitioners, ELs as a group are not the same, and we have to remember that in how we work with them, how we support them, and just helping them move forward in their pathway to their career goals.

And lastly, you know, we've had a great opportunity here in Arlington Public Schools to work with two consultants. Prior to 2019 for about a year-and-a-half until 2019, we worked with WestEd on a program evaluation. The program evaluation was completed in October of 2019. Of course, six months later, we were in a pandemic, so we weren't able to really, you know, really jump into the outcomes, and really make changes, because we went into a little bit of a pandemic mode.

But then, most recently, we've been working with AIR on a five-year strategic plan. And now I know not every district can afford to do an evaluation, but I highly recommend, if you can, having an outside group come in and look at you, look at your program and tell you here are the things that we think could be changed, you know, visiting with stakeholders like parents and students and teachers. But one of the things we've gotten out of both those program evaluations, and kind of where we stand is we have to make changes student by student.

Of course we can't make our changes for each individual student, but recognizing again that students are different, and when we're making changes, make sure we're looking at all students, whether they're dually-identified, whether advanced academic ELs, making sure that all of the needs are met. My standard line, as I am six foot four, one-size-fits-none. And so when people say, why can't we have all of X at middle school, or all of Y in third grade, my standard line is one-size-fits-none. And so we really have to work individually to make sure that programs and services work for all students.

And again, this gets back to that shared responsibility, we have to work with all staff. It's not just the gen ed teachers that's secondary, but it's the third grade teacher, and the art teacher in elementary, and the health and PE. You know, health is a really complicated and complex class for English learners, especially

when they're newly arrived, making sure that teachers there are understanding how to scaffold for the students. My standard line is we're going to keep going. Even though we're making changes in things, the work keeps going because students keep enrolling, and we want to keep moving ahead.

And I think lastly, what I'll close with is as we're making changes, a constant question we say to ourselves, and out loud even, is what's right for kids? What's right for ELs in Arlington Public Schools? Let's make sure the changes we make are appropriate for them, for their goals, and for their families.

Host: A big thank you to our panelists for discussing the important topic of supporting English learners and their educators in the context of post-pandemic recovery. The information, reflections, and experiences that you shared with us 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, or 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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