



Summer 2026

Soleado

Promising Practices from the Field

An Engineer's Odyssey from Albuquerque to Harvard: How My High School Bilingual Education Helped Make My Dreams Come True

by Agustín León Sáenz—Harvard University Graduate

In ninth grade I was a student at the Albuquerque Institute for Mathematics and Science (AIMS), a charter middle and high school located on the University of New Mexico campus. It has a strong focus on math and science and requires its students to participate in dual enrollment with a college or university program. While I felt comfortable with the STEM education I was receiving, I craved an opportunity to connect with my culture on a deeper level.

After doing some research on other high school programs in the Albuquerque area, I discovered two aspects of the curriculum at Albuquerque

High School (AHS) that could challenge me to grow: 1) access to more AP classes, some of which are offered in Spanish, and more importantly, 2) access to the Bilingual Seal program. It was the second that convinced me to transfer to AHS, especially after talking with my mom and dad. After seven years of living in the U.S., I felt myself losing control of my fluency in speaking, reading, and writing Spanish and wanted to do something about it. However, I felt awkward and self-conscious

taking Spanish classes with classmates who spoke Spanish more fluently than I did. I was challenged to face my emotions of anxiety, fear, inferiority, guilt, and shame when I showed up to class feeling unprepared. With dedicated teachers, it became one of the best growth opportunities of my life.

I took advanced classes in Spanish, like chemistry and world history, that initially confused my English-adjusted brain, then provided me

with the necessary study tools to quickly learn Spanish in any subject. With a renewed sense of confidence, belonging, and readiness, I committed to graduating with a Bilingual Seal in Spanish. I worked under the guidance of Mrs. Fabiola Pacheco, the Bilingual Coordinator, who not only helped curate the ideal schedule prioritizing both my classes in Spanish and AP classes and guided the process of making my portfolio, but also reviewed my essays and wrote letters of recommendation for me. The

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*Photo of Agustín and his family was taken
by Chatty Photography - Owner and
Photographer Catherine Dondero.*

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Secondary Language Allocation Planning in Dual Language Bilingual Education

by Natalie Olague—Dual Language Education of New Mexico

Recent discussions in the field regarding Language Allocation Planning in Dual Language Bilingual Education (DLBE) programs (Medina, 2024, 2025) emphasize that students should have regular access to grade-level instruction in both program languages across all content areas, accompanied by intentional and strategic cross-linguistic connections between languages.

Dr. Medina has been particularly clear that strategic cross-linguistic connections do not replace access to grade-level instruction in both languages for all content areas. Rather, cross-linguistic connections are intended to deepen conceptual understanding and support biliteracy development.

Although these ideas initially emerged in the context of elementary DLBE programs, it is reasonable to consider their implications for secondary-level DLBE programs as well. The underlying principle remains consistent—DLBE students should ultimately be able to “language” academic content in both languages, supporting the second goal of DLBE programs: bilingualism and biliteracy.

At the same time, there are many historical examples of language allocation plans in which a single content area is taught in one language for multiple years. For example, some programs have historically taught mathematics exclusively in Spanish from kindergarten through grade five. Dr. Medina shares an anecdotal example of an English-dominant student who received math instruction in Spanish during elementary school and later experienced difficulty when math instruction shifted to English in middle school.

Conversely, other examples suggest different outcomes. In Ysleta Independent School District (El Paso, Texas), students historically received mathematics instruction in Spanish in grades K–5 and then successfully passed or exceeded expectations on state mathematics assessments administered in English. In both cases, however, an important unknown remains: the extent to which

intentional cross-linguistic connections were made between Spanish and English during instruction.

These discussions have significant implications for secondary DLBE language allocation planning, where structural realities differ considerably from elementary programs. Secondary schools are typically departmentalized, meaning that students encounter multiple teachers responsible for different content areas. In addition, many secondary DLBE programs face persistent challenges in recruiting and retaining teachers who are qualified to teach content areas in Spanish. As a result, it is common for secondary DLBE programs to teach certain content areas exclusively in one program language for multiple years, or at minimum for an entire year. These structural realities can make it difficult to implement language allocation models that alternate languages across content areas in the same ways that may be feasible in elementary settings.

However, if sufficient numbers of bilingual content teachers were available at the secondary level, it is possible to envision a more balanced secondary language allocation model. In such a model, bilingual content teachers in areas such as science, mathematics, social studies, and electives could alternate the language of instruction by instructional units so that students encounter academic content in both languages across the school year. At the same time, students would receive coordinated daily instruction in English Language Arts (ELA) and Spanish Language Arts (SLA) to ensure continued development of literacy in both languages.

Given these realities, a critical first step toward realizing the goal of regular access to grade-level instruction in both program languages across all content areas is ensuring that all teachers who serve DLBE students develop the competence to intentionally and strategically facilitate cross-linguistic connections between languages.

This expectation applies not only to bilingual

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teachers who teach content in Spanish, but also to teachers who teach in English and may themselves be monolingual. Importantly, monolingual teachers do not need to be experts in the partner language in order to facilitate cross-linguistic connections. Instead, their role can be to create structured opportunities for students to draw on their own bilingual knowledge and experiences to identify and explain connections between languages.

In this way, teachers act as facilitators of cross-linguistic inquiry, while students contribute their linguistic expertise. Students may help identify cognates, explain how a concept is expressed in the partner language, compare word structures, or discuss similarities and differences between languages. This approach not only supports biliteracy development but also promotes student agency, positioning multilingual learners as knowledgeable contributors within the classroom. In this way, students can develop the ability to “language” academic concepts in both languages, even when formal content instruction occurs primarily in one language.

An example lesson plan that highlights facilitation of cross-linguistic inquiry for middle school science being taught in English follows. This example offers a teacher script and highlights possible cross-linguistic connections specific to the instructional materials used in the lesson.

Facilitating Cross-Linguistic Connections to Build Biliteracy

Science Example (Teacher Script)

Purpose:

Students engage in cross-linguistic analysis to notice how Spanish and English organize and express ideas.

Unit: *Ecology Matter Energy Flow*

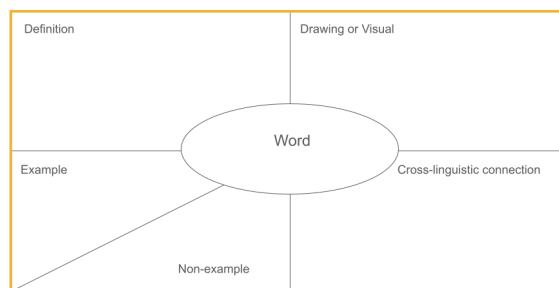
Unit Context

We are coming to the end of our unit where we have been thinking about our essential question: **How are living things connected in an ecosystem?**

Over the past few weeks, we:

- ✓ Read *The Important Book About Ecosystems* and discussed main ideas.
- ✓ Read and analyzed the *Cycles of Matter in Ecosystems* infographic
- ✓ Conducted the science investigation - *Where Does the Matter Go When a Tree Dies?*
- ✓ Wrote informational essays answering the essential question for a *Boreal Forest Ecosystem*

In addition, every day during our bell ringer, you and your partner worked on a Frayer Model with vocabulary from the unit. You didn't just define the words. You also drew pictures, gave examples and non-examples, and connected the English word to Spanish.



Throughout the unit, many of you also noticed and shared connections between English and Spanish during discussions and activities.

Lesson Context

Something important about our classroom is that everyone brings language knowledge. I am still learning Spanish, but most of you already think in two languages. That means we can learn from each other. Sometimes when I look at your vocabulary work, I even ask Sra. Mora to help me understand the Spanish connections you noticed. Today we are going to go deeper and think about how ideas connect across languages. We're not just translating words or sentences. We're thinking like multilingual learners.

Today's learning targets: (refer to where they are displayed)

- ✓ I can explain how energy and matter move through an ecosystem using both languages.
- ✓ I can compare how scientific ideas are expressed in English and Spanish.

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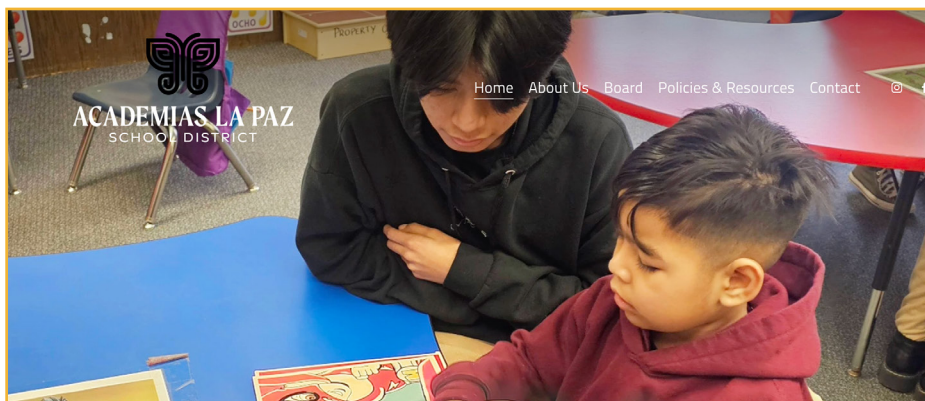
For Seven Hours, They Are Children: What Metro Surge Has Meant for Our Schools

by Norma Citlalli Garcés—Executive Director/Superintendent,
Academias La Paz, Twin Cities, Minnesota

On January 30, 2025, one of our parents was taken.

At first, we were not sure what we had seen. There was hesitation. We asked one another the questions we no longer ask: Was that ICE? Are we overreacting? Did that really happen?

That uncertainty did not last.



What followed was not isolated. It became a pattern. Enforcement activity became visible and sustained—near apartment buildings, along bus routes, outside of schools, and in the everyday spaces our families move through. What had once felt distant and occasional became immediate and constant.

I serve as Executive Director and Superintendent of a Twin Cities charter school district serving more than 500 students. I write from my own experience, but I know ours is not the only story. Across Minneapolis and surrounding communities, schools have lived through this together. Every school community I know has experienced a high level of trauma over the past year.

Our district serves 90% immigrant families, and more than 70% of our licensed teachers and staff are people of color, many of whom are immigrants themselves. For us, the impact of Operation Metro Surge—the largest immigration enforcement action in recent history—has not been momentary. It has been constant. At its peak, more than 3,000 federal immigration agents were deployed across the Twin Cities, while the city of Minneapolis has roughly 600 police officers. That

scale matters. It changed the rhythm of the city. It altered how people moved, where they gathered, and whether they left their homes at all.

If you have never been to Minneapolis, it is

important to understand the place where this happened. Minneapolis is still, in many ways, a predominantly white city, but over the past few decades Somali and

Latino immigrant communities have reshaped neighborhoods, schools, and local economies. Our Latino community is still relatively young. Many of our students are first- or second-generation, and we do not yet have the deep, multi-generational roots that exist in other parts of the country. Families are still building stability, still establishing businesses, still creating a sense of permanence. Metro Surge hit in the middle of that work.

Then everything intensified.

On the week of December 12, 2025, our community entered the highest level of trauma we had experienced. We canceled our winter program that week—not out of caution, but because it was no longer safe to gather. The height of Metro Surge began then, and for many of us it became official on the day of the Virgen de Guadalupe, a sacred day in our community. What should have been a day of devotion and celebration became the day many families understood that the hate directed at our Latino and Somali communities had fully arrived. When Renée Good was killed, our high school in Minneapolis moved to 100% online learning. Almost immediately, our schools shifted to hybrid learning. Families needed flexibility.

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Students needed protection. That model remained in place through mid-March.

Nothing had prepared us for this. In my 30 years of working in schools, I had never seen anything like it. This was the closest to war I have witnessed in a school community. I saw the ugliest parts of humanity in the way people were treated, and I also saw the best of humanity in the way our families, educators, and neighbors protected one another with courage, discipline, and love.

Before this, my role centered on instruction, growth, and community building. Over the past year, it was reduced—at times almost entirely—to safety and security. I spent my days monitoring activity, verifying information, communicating with families in real time, and making decisions minute by minute about whether it was safe to continue as planned.

For many of our families, the most dangerous part of the day was not school. It was getting to and from school.

Our first bus pickup is at 6:28 a.m. By then, enforcement was already present in some neighborhoods. Families looked outside, checked messages, and called each other.

The bus arrived, and sometimes no one got on—not because families do not value education, but because they were making rational decisions about risk.

When buses arrived safely at school, we sent a simple message: “All buses are here.” That message carried enormous weight. It meant children had made it into the building. It meant that, for a little

while, parents could breathe.

For seven hours, our students could focus, laugh, learn, and simply be children.

Then dismissal came, and for about twenty minutes everything tightened again. Students began to wonder whether their parents would be home and whether everything would be the same when they got there. Some cried. Some hesitated to leave. Some held onto teachers a little longer than usual. Buses that once carried 25 students sometimes carried two, and they rode in silence. Two hours later, we sent another message: “All buses are cleared.”

Across our community, families exhaled.

So did we.

There were moments over the past year that made it clear that no school was untouched.

At our high school, where my son graduated, enforcement activity reached the area during dismissal just hours after Renée Good was killed. Armed federal agents arrived near school grounds while students and staff were present, and a staff member was arrested as

they attempted to intervene. In that moment, the boundary schools rely on—the understanding that school is a protected space—collapsed in real time.

It is also important to remember that this is the same city where Mr. Floyd was killed by law enforcement. Our high school sits just blocks from that memorial, and now within the same



Widespread protests took place as ICE agents ramped up their presence in communities across Minneapolis.

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presence of such a dedicated mentor like Mrs. Pacheco in my academic career, who cared about empowering me with the skills and agency to voice my story the way I deserved, ensured my success in higher education.

I was accepted into the prestigious Harvard University and awarded many nationally competitive scholarships with her support. As a college graduate, I now look back fondly

on my time as a high school student, especially as it shaped the adult I am choosing to become. I am the first Ecuadorian-born and New Mexican-raised graduate of the Harvard Environmental Science and Engineering concentration. Given my position as a student at a powerful institution of knowledge creation with a unique understanding of the systemic impacts of environmental racism, I incorporated my story into my academic output. I conducted research as a junior studying the racial and socioeconomic public health disparities in the United States concerning water quality. My laboratory experience consequently inspired my senior thesis, engineering a microfluidic device for heavy metal detection in water, useful to communities in Ecuador and New Mexico contaminated by mining operations. Through funding from the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, I traveled to the Amazon in 2025 to investigate the water quality issues faced by Indigenous groups I spoke with in Spanish. Thus, I identified water resources engineering as my long-term career interest and decided to return to New Mexico after graduation to apply my college education in a way that aligns with my purpose of serving marginalized communities.

I now work as a civil engineer designing water treatment and distribution systems for clients in the Navajo Nation. I credit the Bilingual Seal

program at Albuquerque High for grounding my journey with a curriculum championing cultural preservation and revitalization that laid the groundwork for my career path as a working professional. Despite growing up in a society that so quickly and easily made me feel othered and less than because of my country of origin and my mother tongue, I am the adult I am today because of my teachers, who not only prescribed me the antidote for my existential crisis but

also taught me how to believe in myself even when I could not see my own potential.



Harvard University in Cambridge, MA allowed Agustín to incorporate his unique cultural understanding into his professional goals.



Working as a civil engineer designing water treatment and distribution systems for the Navajo Nation has met Agustín's goal to serve marginalized communities.

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English - Spanish Word Connections

On this chart we will write:

Word in English	Word in Spanish	Similar/Different

Identify English Words

Turn and Talk Prompt: What important vocabulary did we learn about ecosystems?

You can say: “One word we learned about ecosystems was _____.”

(Teacher listens and records words that the students identify on the English side of the chart: ecosystem, interdependent, energy, food web.)

Identify Spanish Words

Now let's start with our first word - **ecosystem**.

Turn and Talk Prompt: What word in Spanish has a similar meaning?

You can say: “I think “interdependent” in Spanish is _____.”

(Teacher listens and records student responses on the Spanish side of the chart.)

Repeat process with remaining words: energy, interdependent, food web.

Thinking About Language: Similar/Different

Now let's look closely at **ecosystem** / **ecosistema**

Talk with a partner:

- ✓ How are these words similar?
- ✓ How are they different?

You can use Spanish, English, or both. I will write down your ideas exactly the way you say them.

Repeat process with the other words. Final chart may look like this:

Word in English	Word in Spanish	Similar/Different
ecosystem	ecosistema	Estas palabras se parecen. They are cognates. The prefix -eco- stays the same. Spanish adds a vowel at the end. I've also seen this pattern in words like system and sistema, and problem and problema.
interdependent	interdependiente	The prefix -inter- stays the same. The root -depend- stays the same. The ending changes from -ent to -iente. I've seen similar word connections with different and diferente.
energy	energía	They look similar. They are cognados. La palabra en español lleva tilde. The ending changes slightly (-gy / -gía). I've also seen this pattern in words like biology/biología and ecology/ecología.
food web	red alimentaria	These words do not look similar They are not cognados. The meaning is similar, but the words are different.

Teacher Moves

- ✓ Ask students for Spanish equivalents rather than providing them.
- ✓ Record student language exactly as they say it.
- ✓ Encourage students to use either language while explaining their thinking.
- ✓ Focus on meaning, not perfect translations.

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English - Spanish Sentence Connections

We've compared individual words. Now, let's analyze how a scientific idea is expressed inside a full sentence.

On this chart we will record:

English Sentence	Spanish Sentence	Notes

As bilingual learners, we know something important: sometimes words translate directly, and sometimes languages express the same idea in a different way. Let's look at this sentence:

Energy moves through a food web in an ecosystem.

How would we say this in Spanish? Write your sentence on your whiteboard. (Students write on whiteboards.)

Class discussion:

I'm noticing a variety of sentences on your whiteboards. That's what bilingual thinkers do. There are often multiple ways to express the same scientific idea across languages.

When I translated the sentence into Spanish word-for-word in Google translate, this is what came up:

La energía se mueve a través de una telaraña de comida.

Key ideas that should come up during discussion with students:

When I discussed this sentence with Sra. Mora, she shared that the sentence was understandable, but it did not sound natural in scientific Spanish.

Instead, Spanish uses: *red alimentaria*

Notice what happened:

English uses a compound noun: *food web* (noun + noun)

Spanish uses: *red alimentaria* (noun + adjective)

English compresses the idea into two nouns.

Spanish describes the network with an adjective.

The meaning stays the same, but the structure changes.

Let's notice something else:

English says: *Energy moves...*

Spanish says: *La energía se mueve...*

Spanish often uses *se* in scientific processes.

English does not.

Languages do not always organize scientific ideas in the same way.

This is what multilingual scientists notice.

Here is the Spanish sentence that one of you wrote on your whiteboard:

La energía se mueve a través de una red alimentaria en un ecosistema.

This sentence uses Spanish scientific language.

Final chart looks like this:

English Sentence	Spanish Sentence	Notes
Energy moves through a food web in an ecosystem.	La energía se mueve a través de una telaraña de comida.	English: food web (compound noun) Spanish: word-for-word translation, Understandable but not scientific Spanish.
Energy moves through a food web in an ecosystem.	La energía se mueve a través de una red alimentaria en un ecosistema.	English: food web (compound noun) Spanish: red alimentaria (noun + adjective)

Closing - Why This Matters

When bilingual learners compare how scientific ideas are expressed across languages, they strengthen their biliteracy. They are not just learning vocabulary. They are learning how language structures scientific thinking.

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Today we noticed:

- ✓ Sometimes words are cognates.
- ✓ Sometimes languages organize ideas differently.
- ✓ Sometimes a word-for-word translation is understandable but not natural.

Multilingual scientists think about meaning and structure, not just matching words. That is a powerful skill.

Exit Ticket

Think about our conversation today.

What is one thing you noticed about how English and Spanish express scientific ideas?

You can write in English, Spanish, or both.

Developing teacher expertise in cross-linguistic pedagogy serves as an essential bridge between current structural realities and the long-term goal of providing students with regular grade-level access to content in both program languages. By strengthening teachers' capacity to facilitate intentional cross-linguistic connections, secondary DLBE programs can continue advancing the three central goals of dual language bilingual education: academic achievement, bilingualism and biliteracy, and sociocultural competence, while working toward more balanced language allocation structures in the future.

*Ejemplo de artes de lenguaje en español
Guión del maestro - siguiendo la misma
guía didáctica*

Unidad: Supervivencia, esperanza y perseverancia

Contexto de la unidad: Hemos estado reflexionando sobre esta pregunta esencial - ¿Cómo ayudan la esperanza y la perseverancia a las personas a sobrevivir desafíos difíciles?

Durante las últimas semanas:

- leímos y analizamos el libro - **Una larga travesía hasta el agua: Basada en una historia real** (Park, 2011).
- conversamos sobre las experiencias de dos personajes de la historia - Salva y Nya
- identificamos temas como la perseverancia, la esperanza, la supervivencia y la responsabilidad.

- usamos evidencia del texto para explicar cómo los personajes responden a los desafíos.

Observemos más de cerca el vocabulario.

responsabilidad - responsibility son cognados.

Observo un patrón: en español algunas palabras terminan en -idad y en inglés terminan en -ity. Por ejemplo, comunidad - community, sociedad - society.

- **perseverancia perseverance** - Estas palabras están relacionadas, pero las terminaciones son diferentes. Ambas significan continuar aunque algo sea difícil.

supervivencia - survival - Estas palabras se relacionan porque ambas hablan de mantenerse con vida.

esperanza hope significan lo mismo, pero no se parecen. No son cognados.

Vamos a observar más de cerca una oración.

Tener esperanza ayuda a las personas a sobrevivir.

Ideas clave que deben surgir:

Si tradujéramos palabra por palabra, podríamos decir: **Having hope helps people survive**. La mayoría de los hablantes del inglés normalmente dicen: **Hope helps people survive**.

En español, usamos **tener esperanza**. La idea se construye alrededor de la acción de tener. Usa una frase verbal (tener esperanza).

En inglés, usamos **hope**. La idea se expresa como un concepto nombrado. Usa un sustantivo (hope).

Hoy también notamos algo importante:

- A veces podemos traducir palabra por palabra.
- A veces los idiomas organizan las ideas de manera diferente.
- A veces los hablantes bilingües piensan en el significado y eligen la oración que suena más natural.

Cuando los estudiantes bilingües comparan idiomas, fortalecen su biliteracidad porque están aprendiendo cómo funcionan ambos idiomas. Se convierten en lectores, escritores y pensadores más fuertes en los dos idiomas. ¡Esta es una de las ventajas de estar en un salón de doble inmersión!

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landscape of grief that includes the memorials for Renée Good and Alex Pretti. Our students are growing up surrounded by these histories not as distant events, but as places they pass, gather near, and learn beside.

Many people in our community were terrified from the beginning, but when white people started getting killed too, the fear shifted in a different way, because it made clear that no one was safe anymore.

Attendance dropped sharply as families made the decision to keep children home rather than risk what might happen on the way to school. In some cases, very young children were detained. Entire systems shifted from teaching and learning to locating students, checking on families, and responding to crises as they unfolded.

During the height of Metro Surge in mid-December and into January, the city changed in a way that was impossible to ignore. Streets that are usually active felt empty. People stayed inside. Businesses slowed. Churches were empty. The silence was visible. This was happening in the middle of a Minnesota winter, with weeks of subzero temperatures, which made movement harder and isolation deeper.

By mid-December, most Latino restaurants, mercados, and small businesses had security at the door. Many kept their doors locked and only let people in after checking who was outside. Families were hiding inside their homes, and the city felt suspended, as if daily life had been put on hold. People missed doctor appointments, because

ICE was showing up in and around hospitals and clinics. Families understood that seeking medical care could put them at risk of detention. What should have been routine and protected—seeking care, preparing for the birth of a child—became

decisions shaped by the presence of ICE.

It was not only the scale of enforcement that was traumatic; it was the level of cruelty.

Agents went into Mexican restaurants, ate there, and then detained workers after they finished. They moved

through our markets and businesses after our community had already tightened security and was trying to protect itself. These were not random locations. They were places built by immigrant families, places where people know each other by name, where owners recognize customers, and where language and culture live in ordinary daily exchanges. To enter those places in that way was dehumanizing. It showed a willingness to take from our community while targeting it, to move through spaces built by our labor and our care without recognizing the humanity of the people inside them.

Inside our schools, the impact showed up in ways that were both visible and quiet.

We saw students who were tired in a way that sleep does not fix. We saw anxiety, headaches, and difficulty concentrating. We saw children trying to manage emotions that did not belong to them.

We also saw resilience, but not the kind that should be romanticized. We saw young people



ICE agents gather in Minneapolis. Creator: Tim Evans, Copyright: Tim Evans, Credit: REUTERS

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stepping into roles they should not have to carry. Our high school students, in particular, had to grow up quickly. Because of our school's location and the nonstop whistles outside, our high school moved to 100% online learning. It was incredibly traumatic. Students were trying to learn while listening for sounds that signaled danger. At the same time, they were doing the grocery shopping, so their parents did not have to leave the house, translating legal information, organizing care for younger siblings, checking in on neighbors, and reminding their parents to stay safe. They were carrying adult responsibilities while still expected to show up as students.

And still, they did.

We had 21 seniors this year, and every single one applied to a higher education institution. That did not happen because circumstances were stable. It happened because educators, counselors, and community members wrapped around them with intention and care, and because those students refused to let this moment define their future.



A sign in a Minnesota neighborhood reads: ICE Kidnapped our Neighbors Jan. 2026.

There were also moments that exposed something deeper and more painful to name.

A young Latino man, David, was arrested at a Target. He was a student. He was a young man. He was a U.S. citizen. And still, he was treated as if he did not belong.

For our students, that moment was not abstract. It confirmed what many already felt: that their humanity could be questioned even when their legal status could not. That is what dehumanization looks like in real time. It is not policy language. It is not debate. It is lived, and it is

felt by our students every day. And yet, this is not only a story of harm.

It is also a story of how a community responds. Our families did not remain passive. They organized. They built systems of communication that moved faster than any institution. They documented enforcement activity with precision—location, time, number of agents, and what they were doing. Information was shared clearly and responsibly. People learned their rights. They practiced them. They stood together.

At a local store, when agents attempted to enter, community members asked for a judicial warrant. They stood together calmly and firmly, and the agents left.

Neighbors checked on neighbors. Families made plans for who would pick up children if someone did not make it home. Allies showed up consistently, quietly, and with commitment. This is what solidarity looked like in practice.

We are a dual language community. In our schools, Spanish is both a program requirement

and an academic goal—not as a bridge to replace it with English, but as a commitment to sustaining both languages fully. We build bilingualism so that neither language is lost, and because language is inseparable from identity.

Over this past year, language became something more. It became how families found each other, how they warned one another, and how they made sure no one was alone. Spanish and Spanglish are the ways we *nos apapachamos*.

What sustained our community was not a system. It was trust.

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11-14
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Grammy-winning Music Duo



Allison DiCecio Briceño
Professor
San José State University



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Professor Emeriti
George Mason University



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Families trusted each other enough to answer calls, share information, and show up without hesitation. Our parent liaisons played a critical role in that process. They listened carefully, connected families, and made sure information moved with accuracy and care. They did not create community. They strengthened what was already there.

We listened, and that mattered.

It allowed families to lead. Our community did not wait to be saved. Families protected themselves, organized quickly, and made collective decisions about how to move, when to move, and how to care for one another's children. Safety was built in real time, grounded in relationships that existed long before this moment.

It was extremely unsafe to be in our school. Yet our support staff—100% people of color—made sure our families never went without food and other necessities. Since then and through the end of March, delivering food into neighborhoods

saturated with ICE became a weekly routine that no one missed. Staff showed up consistently, even when their own families were staying inside, even when they themselves were in need of the same food they were delivering. This was not extra work. It was what had to be done. Our support staff moved through those conditions with discipline and commitment, making sure that families had what they needed to get through each week.

The surge of federal agents has now receded. The visible presence that once defined our streets is no longer at the same scale, but what remains is harder to name and harder to repair. We are left with the debris: students who are still afraid when it is time to go home, children experiencing separation anxiety in ways we had not seen before, and families who continue to move cautiously even when the immediate threat feels less visible. Fear does not leave as quickly as the agents do.



Academias La Paz' Festival de Primavera brought together staff, parents, and children for a return to safety and joy.

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Our school was not untouched by trauma, but we worked hard to reduce it by telling the truth about what was happening. I held weekly Zoom meetings with our families and partners, and attendance was consistently above 90 percent. We shared information, answered questions, and made space for people to process what they were living through. We organized together, and in doing so, we diminished the trauma as much as possible.

Our parent liaisons were essential to that effort. They listened, they connected, and they helped make sure communication remained clear and grounded in trust. They did not lead from above; they worked within the community, reinforcing relationships that already existed.

Our families did the work. They organized, protected each other, and made decisions together. The school did not save the community. We followed their lead, created space for that leadership to exist, and supported in the ways we could.

What sustained us was not a savior story. White allies did not come in to rescue us, and our Latino community did not move through this as victims waiting to be saved. For the most part, we worked together. We respected one another, we respected each other's dignity, and we showed up in the ways that were needed. Families led. Educators listened. Allies stood with us, not over us. Love was what kept us strong—love practiced as trust, as discipline, as mutual care, and as a commitment to protect one another without taking anyone's voice away.

For seven hours each day, we can still give our students a space where they are safe, where they are seen, and where they can be children. Now, the work is helping them feel that way again beyond those seven hours.



Allies stood with the community. Love for neighbors was practiced as trust, as discipline, as mutual care, and as a commitment to protect one another without taking anyone's voice away.



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