

The NYSABE Bilingual Times

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SPRING 2020 Issue



New York University
Metropolitan Center for Research
on Equity and the Transformation of
Schools

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Alicia Báez-Barinas

A Message from the President

WELCOME

DEAR NYSABE FAMILY,

These past couple months have been challenging at best; I applaud your resilience and the amazing work you're doing to ensure we're providing a multitude of services to our multilingual learners and their families, all while attending to your own loved ones.

This issue of *The NYSABE Bilingual Times* will focus on **Supporting our Multilingual Students Amid COVID-19**.

The Coronavirus pandemic has impacted communities across New York State. People from all walks of life have been adversely affected during this time of remote learning. Our multilingual and

immigrant students, along with their families, are to be considered one of the most vulnerable populations. While it's evident this is due to the interruption of supports and services received at school, this pandemic has shed light on the inequities that exist within our education system.

I want to encourage you to keep advocating and pushing forward — if we want light to continue flooding the lives of our students, we must stand where the light is shining. This pandemic, while shedding light, will cause some to want to look away and shield their eyes...stay the course and make them see!

(Continued on next page)

Inside this issue

We've been working hard to advocate and most recently have:

- Collaborated with NABE on a letter that was sent to Washington D.C. demanding that more federal aid be given to states for our multilingual learners;
- Through our work with NY Advocates for Fair and Inclusive Resources for Multilingual Learners (NY-AFFIRMS), we've worked with both educational and community based organizations to send a position statement to the New York State Department of Education

asking for additional funding and resources for students, families, AND teachers;

- Support NYSABE regions who are in specific need of advocacy as they work to battle inequities within districts.

NYSABE is always here with you, every step of the way! As we continue to push forward together, take time to digest the articles found within this issue, I know they will serve as a great resource for you!

As we continue to navigate these uncharted waters we must do it together,

regardless of language and geographic boundaries. You're all tremendous warriors and the sun will come out after this storm! It's been heart-warming to see so many of you post videos for your districts, students, and families.... AMAZING work!

Stay the course, leadership is not about being in charge; it's about taking care of those IN your charge. True leaders have a servant's heart and that is exactly what I think about when I think of all of you! Thank you for all you're doing.... GRACIAS!

Alicia Báez-Barinas
NYSABE President, 2019-2020

A Note from the Editor

歓迎 ようこそ
BIENVENIDO



Gliset Colón, PhD

I would like to introduce myself as the new editor for *The NYSABE Bilingual Times*. I am an Assistant Professor at SUNY Buffalo State. I am also the Coordinator for the Bilingual Graduate Certificate Program. I teach courses on topics related to bilingual special education, behavior and classroom management, and foundations of special education. In addition to teaching, my research interests are in literacy and language outcomes for multilingual students with and without disabilities,

multi-tiered systems of support, disproportionality, culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies, and intersectionality. I recognize the role of editor is a significant responsibility, and I thank the Board of Directors for the trust they have placed in my ability to work in collaboration with Nancy Villarreal de Adler, Executive Director of NYSABE, and the Delegate Assembly. I am excited about the future of the newsletter and am committed to facilitating the dissemination of invaluable information for the benefit of our multilingual communities across the state.

In this issue of *The Bilingual Times*, we focus on the response across the state to the COVID-19 pandemic. With the entire state now engaging in remote learning, we highlight the successes and challenges of educating multilingual and immigrant students via digital learning. We provide some helpful academic resources for supporting multilingual and immigrant students. Finally, we provide a link to the NY Affirms Regional Education Survey - COVID-19 Response to gather more information about what districts across the state are doing to support our students. In addition to addressing the COVID-19 pandemic,

we highlight an interview of Ms. Elisa Alvarez, Associate Commissioner for the Office of Bilingual Education and World Languages, New York State Education Department. Finally, we pay tribute to Teresa Mlawer, former president of Lectorum. Teresa will always be remembered for her efforts and commitment to ensure access to quality bilingual education.

It is evident through the work of our multilingual educators across the state, that despite experiencing a global pandemic, we continue to be dedicated to the mission of NYSABE and to providing a concierge level of support to our multilingual and immigrant students and their families. While the 2020 conference has been postponed, we should continue to focus on the 2020 theme of equity in action and collaborative leadership. It is through this collaborative leadership that we will weather this storm. I thank you for your time and contributions and I sincerely hope this newsletter finds you and your loved ones well during this unprecedented time.

In solidarity and strength.

IN MEMORIAM

Teresa Mlawer (1945-2020)



Hilda Viskovic
Educational Sales Manager
LECTORUM

Teresa Mlawer, a pioneer in Spanish language publishing in the United States, passed away peacefully at home on March 21, 2020.

Ms. Mlawer immigrated to the United States from Cuba in 1961 and began her career in publishing at Macmillan Publishers in 1963. Among the many positions she held in publishing, Ms. Mlawer was the Export Manager at Simon and Schuster and Regents Publishing. Later, she joined her husband, William, at Lectorum Publications, where she served as President and Editorial Director. There, she oversaw the acquisition, selection, and editorial development of Spanish-language books for children and young adults. After the acquisition of Lectorum by Scholastic, she continued to hold the same position at Lectorum. In 2012 she retired from Lectorum and continued as a consultant for many publishing houses like Rosen and Santillana.

Ms. Mlawer translated over 500 children's books from English to Spanish. Some of the classics of children's literature she translated are *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak, *Goodnight Moon* by Margaret Wise Brown, *The Cat in the Hat* by Dr. Seuss, *Sylvester and The Magic Pebble* by William Steig, *Thank You, Mr. Falker* by Patricia Polacco, *Last Stop on Market Street* by Matt de la Peña, winner of the 2016 Newbery Medal, *The Day You Begin* by Jacqueline Woodson, *Miguel's Brave Knight* by Margarita Engle, *Love* by Matt de la Peña, *Turning Pages* by Sonia Sotomayor, and the Award-winning *Blue Sky White Stars* by Sarvinder Naberhaus.

As a well-known specialist in children's literature in Spanish, she worked with publishers, educators, and librarians to increase access to the best authentic literature for Hispanic children in this country. She was also a strong and vocal advocate for Latino authors and illustrators in the United States. In 2012, she was selected by the Federation of Spanish Publishers in Argentina as one of the 50 most influential people in the Spanish publishing world. Ms. Mlawer was an Executive Board Member of Reforma Educational Foundation.

Ms. Mlawer was the author of two bilingual children's series: *Fairy Tales/Cuentos de Hadas* and *Timeless Fables/Fábulas de Siempre*, published by Adirondack Books.



Teresa Mlawer (1945-2020)

"As a bilingual education leader, Teresa always ensured Lectorum's most generous support for NYSABE's conference as well as regional and school events. She also worked tirelessly with advocates and teacher educators to ensure access to quality bilingual instructional materials and meaningful resources for students, teachers, and parents. Teresa will always be remembered by her colleagues and friends for her energy, expertise, generosity, clear vision, and her profound commitment to bilingual/biliteracy education."

— Nancy Villarreal de Adler

https://youtu.be/Km_OWTBPS2k



THOUSANDS OF CHILDREN READ STORIES LIKE "OLIVIA" TO KEEP BUILDING A WORLD FULL OF POSSIBILITIES

Teresa Mlawer: a voice that made us grow and believe in the transformative power of stories.

We safeguard your legacy!



Supporting Multilingual and Immigrant Students during School Closures



Tamara Alsace, PhD
NYSABE Past-President (2015-2017)



Gliset Colón, PhD
NYSABE Delagate-at-Large
The Bilingual Times Editor

PART I: AVAILABLE AND ACCESSIBLE RESOURCES

The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically changed the educational landscape of our country. More specifically, in New York State, all P-12 schools have moved to remote learning for an indefinite amount of time. The instruction varies widely, from regularly scheduled Zoom, Google Classroom, or other teleconference platform lessons with groups or individual students, to “packets” of worksheets to be completed at home, presumably with the assistance of families and with little or no support from a teacher. The digital divide, especially across socio-economic strata, is only one of the challenges facing

educators and multilingual families. Circumstances such as living space, access to healthy foods, and of course the socio-emotional strain of living in a time of fear and uncertainty all impact teaching, learning, and daily living.

The response plan to the COVID-19 pandemic seems to be a moving target as there are new developments almost daily. One thing that should remain consistent however, is the level of support we provide to our multilingual learners (MLLs) and immigrant students. Although we as educators are facing many challenges and concerns, it is imperative we provide our multilingual families with resources to ensure students remain academically engaged throughout this difficult time.

The New Teacher Project (TNT) Reimagine Learning offers tips to districts on moving to online learning and specifically in supporting ELLs/MLLs during the COVID-19 crisis, including ways to communicate with families. For more information, visit: https://tntp.org/assets/documents/ELL_and_ELD_At-Home_Learning_Support-TNTP.pdf

The following are resources that can be shared with educators and families.

PLANNING

- *Colorín Colorado* provides tips for planning for e-learning at: <https://www.colorincolorado.org/coronavirus-ell>
- *Spanishprofe.com* provides tips for planning distance learning in your bilingual classroom at: <https://spanishprofe.com/tips-for-planning-distance-learning-in-your-bilingual-classroom/>

LOW TECHNOLOGY

- <https://eslathome.edublogs.org/> provides tech free activities for students that require only paper and pencil, and some materials that can be found around the house for grades K through 8 in multiple languages.
- <https://illinoisearlylearning.org/resources/tipsheets/> provides one-page “Tip Sheets” that are easy-to-read, on a variety of topics of interest to parents and teachers of young children in multiple languages.

ONLINE LEARNING

- *Commonsense media* has partnered with 25 of the biggest media and technology companies to offer free access to a wide array of resources. Some are available in multiple languages and designed specifically for ELL/MLLs at: <https://wideopenschool.org/programs/educator/6-12/english-language-learners>

E-BOOKS AND OTHER LITERACY RESOURCES

- uniteforliteracy.com has many Spanish (and English) e-books with audio narration available in 30+ other languages.
- commonlit.org has a host of resources and activities for parents to do with kids at home. It includes Lexiles, grade levels, and genre, along with a system for filtering by literary device, skill, etc. Grades 3-12.
- <https://www.wilbooks.com/free-spanish-online-books> Grades PK-2.
- <https://maguare.gov.co/leer/> Sponsored by the Colombian Ministerio de Cultura, Maguaré is a one-in-a-million find for Spanish materials.

You can access over 100 picture books, poems, and tongue twisters. (A few are set to music or include audio as well).

- espanol.free-ebooks.net has books for adults, children, and everything in between.
- Other sources of free e-books (the books here are older, including some classics) are:
 - manybooks.net which has languages other than Spanish too
 - gutenberg.org which consists of 60K+ free e-books to download

We recognize the amount of resources shared online is astronomical and can be overwhelming, and hope these listed resources can serve as a foundation for those who are struggling to engage their students remotely. The important thing for all of us to keep in mind is that we are learning as we go and that the situation is new and difficult for everyone. We must remember to be flexible and forgiving of ourselves and others as we struggle with a new reality, learn from our mistakes, while also making sure that we prioritize self-care and celebrate our successes. **We are in this together and we will get through it together!**

PART II: HOW ARE WE DOING?

Realizing that our educational

communities are struggling to adjust to new circumstances during the COVID-19 shutdown, NYSABE and its partners at NY-AFFIRMS, are interested in hearing about the challenges districts, schools, and teachers are facing in order to determine areas of focus for our advocacy efforts. **Please take a moment to visit the Regional Education Survey - COVID-19 Response at the following links: <https://www.tfaforms.com/4812151> (English) or <https://www.tfaforms.com/4813871> (Spanish) and complete the comprehensive survey developed by the NY Immigration Coalition. Also, please share with colleagues and families.**

Survey topics include: Remote Learning (Early Childhood and K-12), Food Access, Childcare for Essential Workers, Technology, Language Access, Services - (IEPs, ELLs, Students in Temporary Housing), Early Childhood, and Adult Education.

Survey questions include but are not limited to:

- Has your school district and/or school transitioned to use packets, take home materials, or other printed materials?
- What are other ways your school/district is delivering educational opportunities for kids at this time?
- What other issues are ELLs/MLLs/

immigrants accessing remote learning experiencing?

- Do all students have access to a computer?
- Are there other technological issues families are having to access online learning? Please explain.
- How are ELLs/MLLs/immigrant families being informed on how to access food, childcare, and remote learning?
- Have students who require special services been able to receive them as schools transition into remote learning? Please explain.
- Are early childhood centers in your area remaining open?
- Have adult education programs moved to remote learning?
- Are there other education issues affecting ELLs/MLLs/immigrants you would like to share with us?

We appreciate your participation in this survey. The data collected will be aggregated and will not identify individual respondents. Your responses will help inform our advocacy agenda by giving us valuable insights into the challenges faced as well as needed supports.



My Journey



Hulda Yau
5th-6th Grade Bilingual Teacher
Rochester City School District

As an elementary school teacher of nearly 17 years, I've always taken pride in giving my students high quality instruction. My lesson plans were carefully designed to meet students' individual needs as they moved towards excellence. Every Monday morning I felt fully prepared for the week. I even had a plan B for the unexpected. In my arsenal, I had years of experience and lesson plans that would make any teacher walk a little straighter with an air of confidence. Yes, that was me. Until I was thrown into the fire of distant learning.

My worst nightmare suddenly became a reality. A cruel dichotomy. An experienced teacher without experience. I wasn't prepared for distant learning and it never even crossed my mind. At school, all my students had a chromebook. This academic year I have a combined class of fifth and sixth graders. Together, with Google Classroom and our precious Smartboard, we were able to navigate the sea of writing genres, chemical and physical changes in matter, and the coordinate system with ordered pairs. Learning was a collaborative process and we always did it in small groups. Suddenly, everything changed without warning.

When the unprecedented reality sunk deep inside my brain, I realized that the magic of the classroom had vanished. I felt like the coqui in Puerto Rico that can only thrive in warm weather because its body temperature depends on the temperature of the surrounding environment. The environment of my classroom was filled with giggles and chatter from my amazing students that always enjoyed having a little fun while learning. Our classroom was never silent because learning should be collaborative and interactive. Our walls were filled with charts from all subjects that displayed the skills and strategies we had learned. They were revered as silent teachers. I've always depended on this environment to thrive as an educator.

My students' warm hugs and "Adiós Ms. Yau, te quiero" was like pixie dust. It was what I needed to fly and take them with me in a beautiful journey of learning. Those faces looking at me from their desks inspired me to be the best teacher because they deserved it. It was my priority and responsibility to give them a high quality education. Not only did I want to teach them, I wanted to inspire them. If you're a fan of Simon Sinek you've heard him say, "If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader." This is how I measure my success as an educator. With a simple question: Do I inspire my students to dream big and become more?

Now the looming questions are: "How can I teach and inspire my students through distant learning?" "How can my arsenal filled with the tools I've collected for nearly 17 years help me now?" "How can I continue to use cross-language connections to advance my students along their language continuum as

emergent bilinguals?" I had many questions yet few answers. I'm told to teach with my students scattered all around the city and all I have is a laptop and an iPad. I realized then that I needed to evolve like a creature that's been taken out of its environment and is forced to adapt to a new one to survive.

After the tsunami of emotions subsided, I began to call all my students' parents individually to see what kind of technology was available at home. It wasn't a surprise to hear that most homes just had a smart phone as their only technology device. Very few had a tablet or computer. This immediately excluded Google Classroom as an option for instruction. I soon received an email that seemed like a glimmer of hope. My district was going to give sixth graders chromebooks after making sure all seventh to twelfth grade students had received one. Although this was hopeful, I knew it would take at least three weeks for my sixth graders to have a chromebook to use at home. I just couldn't wait that long to resume instruction. Anyway, what was I supposed to do with my fifth graders who didn't qualify for a chromebook? I needed a solution that was inclusive of all students. I wasn't willing to leave anyone behind.

I finally came to the realization that a YouTube channel was clearly the easiest and fastest way for me to deliver lessons to my students. I was still in a haze of fear and uncertainty that was not allowing me to think beyond YouTube. Looking at my iPad I realized I had an application called *Explain Everything*. It was a trial so it didn't show all the bells and whistles of its potential but it gave me enough to conclude that this was my north star. Through our Class Dojo account, I informed parents how I would

resume instruction. Not all parents were connected to Dojo and it became another endeavor.

In the midst of the madness, I came across this quote by Dr. Martin Luther King, “We can all get more together than we can apart... this is the way to gain power. Power is the ability to achieve purpose. Power is the ability to affect change.” I thought about the word together and purpose. I decided to reach out to my ENL teacher and Special Education consultant teacher for support in delivering lessons to the class YouTube channel. Although we were no longer in the classroom, I knew we could still be a team. They agreed and we all took up a roll in distant learning. My ENL teacher would make videos to support students with English phonics and my Special Education teacher agreed to do math for my fifth graders. I was delighted.

I finally had the courage to step into the distant learning arena as I began creating math videos for my sixth

graders. My greatest fear was to be judged on my instructional videos that didn't capture my potential as an educator. They revealed my limited experience in online teaching. I learned to be at peace knowing that I could slowly create something different but still magical and special for my students. It was never going to be as good as the classroom, but it would clearly capture my love and dedication to them. This thought was enough for me. It sustained me.

Once I had a few math lessons posted, I began to add videos in English to increase language development through reading. It was important for me to use Spanish to support them in comprehension and cross language connections. I read the same informational text in Spanish then English. Before the reading, I discussed key vocabulary words in both languages to prepare them for the reading. My students loved that I continued to read the text in both languages just like I did in the classroom.

As I began to fall into somewhat of a rhythm, and my students began to acquire technology devices, I decided to start a Zoom class. I thought it would be great if every Monday, Wednesday and Friday we met as a group to read and discuss *Esperanza Renace* by Pat Muñoz Ryan. Since my students didn't have the book I decided to record the reading and post it on our YouTube channel. Although I don't have all my students showing up to our Zoom class, it warms my heart to see the faces that do pop up on my screen. I'm devoted to calling and texting all of them before every class to encourage them to participate.

Although I'm no longer in the classroom surrounded by its magic, my commitment to educating my students remains unaltered by our new unique reality. I'm committed to keeping my students connected and feeling special and not alone. My commitment as an educator will motivate and inspire this next generation of students to become the fullest expression of their humanity. This is why I teach.





Tatyana Kleyn, EdD
The City College of New York
NYSABE Past-President (2014-2015)

Addressing the Socioemotional Well-being of Bilingual & Immigrant Students: Educators Rising to the Coronavirus Call

The COVID-19 pandemic has turned our world inside out, or perhaps outside in (as many of us are forced to stay indoors). Our students have had to deal with trauma, stressors and uncertainty in new and unpredictable ways. Furthermore, Black and Latinx communities have been disproportionately impacted by this virus due to structural breakdowns, and Asian Americans are experiencing increased discrimination and racist attacks as they are wrongfully being blamed for the start of this virus. This means that it is our bilingual students and immigrant families who are bearing a larger burden of the suffering, all while keeping our state and country running in their roles as essential workers. For educators, this reality requires a focus on the socioemotional well-being of students and families.

To get a sense of how educators are supporting their students' well-being and healing, I sought to learn about the practices of teachers across the nation. After circulating an online questionnaire, I received over 25 responses and have organized them into seven categories:

Taking a Stance of Compassion and Understanding

Teachers across the country are learning, through a lens of compassion, about the new realities our students and their families are living through. María V. Díaz, an educator from the NYS Statewide Language RBERN at NYU, explains what taking such a stance looks like in practice:

In working with teachers, one point that I stress is to be compassionate with their students certainly, but also with their families and with themselves. Remote teaching and learning is a new frontier for all of us. Couple that with managing the logistics (inequitable technology, artificial curriculum, lack of scaffolding for our most vulnerable populations), then add families living in tight quarters, financial burdens primarily due to not being able to work, the daily count of deaths that loop the newsreels result in everyone needing socioemotional learning (SEL). So I proclaim being compassionate with everyone. Teachers, it is ok to have activities that take the students away from their screens, parents it is ok not to know how to help your child with 4th grade arithmetic, students it is ok to be sad over missing your school friends.

It is ok! Give yourselves permission to be compassionate and let that compassion reign when we return to the new “normal”.

Consistent and Varied Communication

In the absence of in-person contact, teachers are finding myriad ways to maintain communication with their students and families. Whatsapp, Google Meets, Google Forms, WeChat, Remind, WebEx, phone calls, video calls, text messages, and email are some of the ways they have stayed in contact. Martina Meijer, a 4th grade bilingual teacher at PS 139 NYC DOE, also mails postcards to students who do not have access to technology and/or wifi. These communications can serve as a way to learn more about what each family is dealing with, checking in on their well-being, and discussing how learning will take place in order to ease anxiety about virtual learning. Sometimes these communications are to individual students. Ashley, a bilingual teacher checks in on her students to ensure they have eaten, especially if they are home alone. Sometimes teachers reach out to small groups of students to build a sense of community and reconnection with their peers. Colleen, a teacher in Buffalo calls families to check on their needs from food to technology, and emphasizes “I want to know that families and students are okay...we can worry about the work later on!” Jessica Sinchi, a special education teacher of ELA and Social Studies at IS 73Q NYC DOE, says, “We usually designate a time everyday and just catch up with one another, ranging from school work to how they’re adjusting because of COVID and so much more.”

Inclusion of Home Languages and Translanguaging

This pandemic has highlighted the importance of access to information, and in some immigrant families, English-only notifications can be an obstacle. Teachers across content areas and programs are finding ways to use home languages to build bridges of understanding. Some teachers are bilingual themselves, while others rely more on translation apps, which aren’t perfect, but are helpful. One teacher explains, “It comforts students and families to know that they can communicate in either language and obtain an understanding of the assignment or resolve an issue.” Maryann Hasso allows her students to read a book in their home language and submit a bilingual summary, thereby lowering the stress of working in a new language exclusively. One teacher has noticed that, “being able to communicate in their own language gives many students and their parents additional emotional support as they are heard and understood during this shelter in time.” By encouraging everyone to use all their linguistic resources, educators are reducing anxieties and making vital information more accessible.

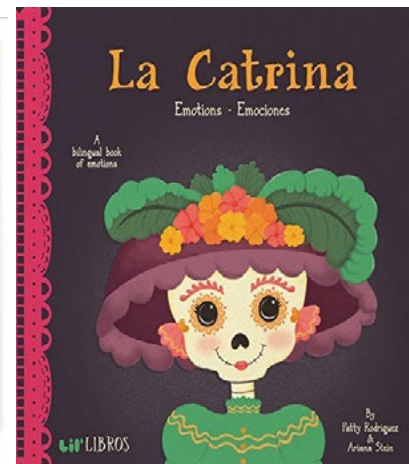
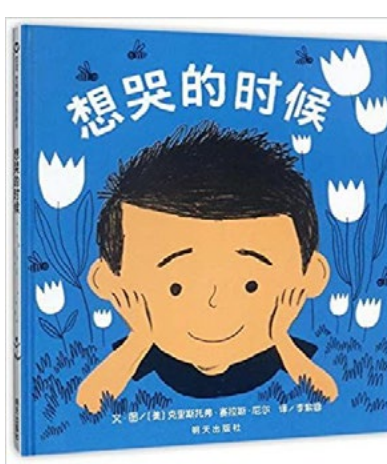
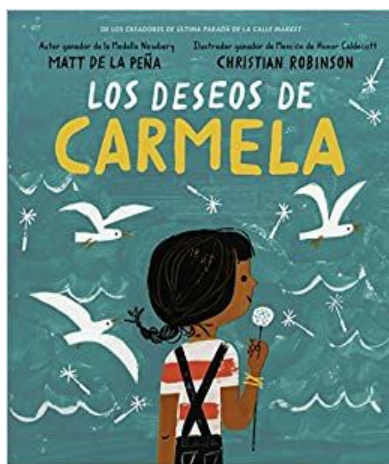
Lessons on Emotions through Literature, Arts and More

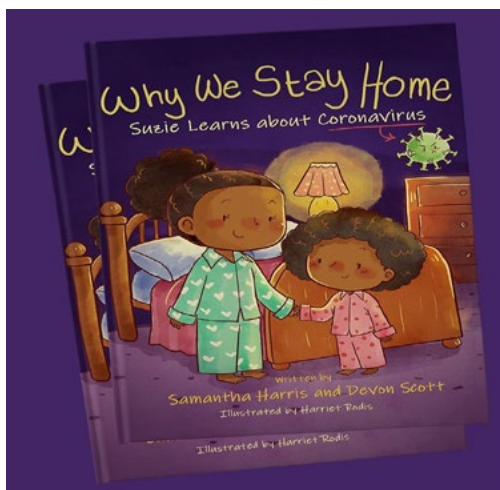
Students display emotions through a range of behaviors, often without talking about them or identifying exactly how they are feeling. Michele Damato, a teacher from PS 165 NYC DOE, shares, “I provide students with a socioemotional check-in google form each day with a visual feelings chart. This helps me to know how they are feeling and address any concerns with families directly.”



Some schools have lessons that focus explicitly on SEL. Albany International Center School, a secondary newcomers school has a range of SocioEmotional Learning virtual classes. One class uses restorative classroom circle principles and “students also share quotes, songs, and other positive messages to connect with and inspire each other,” Liz Gialanella, the school psychologist explains. Maria Rodriguez, a 4th grade bilingual teacher from PS 239Q NYC DOE, has “students meditate and work on different self-care activities to help them manage their emotions and attitudes such as positive affirmations, practicing gratitude, writing down their thoughts, and creating *All About Me* projects.”

Literature can be a powerful starting point for conversations about one’s feelings and how to approach them. Dayle Pomerantz, an early childhood bilingual teacher says they use “bilingual books for children that speak about feelings [and] encourages children to dictate their words to an adult to draw pictures in a journal.” Here are just a few examples of multilingual books educators can use with their students:





Why We Stay Home is a newly released book that deals directly with the Coronavirus, and can be [downloaded for free](#).

The arts can also be a way for students to deal with challenging circumstances and express their feelings. Pamela Broussard, a High School New Arrival Center Teacher from Houston, Texas had her bilingual students recreate famous artwork via the [Getty Museum Challenge](#). She shares, “I was shocked by the fantastic pieces my students created.



While it was not a part of the assignment, it soon became very obvious that their art choices reflected how they were feeling in regard to COVID-19. They also brought all of us a great deal of smiles and laughter.”

Grounding and Mindful Practices



While many adults have turned to yoga and meditation to get through these times, students can also benefit from these grounding approaches. Alejandra Ramos Gomez is a 1st grade bilingual teacher in Dallas Texas who started a YouTube channel called [Aprendamos con Ms. Ramos](#) (Learning with Ms. Ramos). She creates videos in Spanish to “include different science-based mindfulness and meditation practices in a student-friendly

format.”

Seeking Out Additional Supports and Advocating For Families

Even though they try, teachers cannot do it all! And with a “Maslow before Bloom” mindset, Pamela Broussard says, “I provide families with links to food banks and food distribution locations.” Angela Timm, an ESL middle school teacher in New Jersey “advocated for access to a bilingual counselor for a student who communicated his fear after hearing that someone close to him tested positive for COVID-19.” And sometimes teachers take matters into their own hands. Sylvia Morse Pachas, an ENL teacher in Buffalo shared that they “delivered a care package to one of my refugee families after I did a videoconference lesson and realized they were lacking a few school essentials.”

Expressing Gratitude

Even in challenging times, it’s important to show gratitude for what we have in our lives and the people who are helping us get through this historic moment. Pedro Calixto is a 5th grade bilingual teacher at PS 169 in Brooklyn who had students write thank you letters to essential workers, in Spanish.

NOTA DE AGRADECIMIENTO**Fecha: 16-04-2020****De: Adrián Zhiminaicela Jara.****Para: Estimados trabajadores esenciales**

A los señores doctores, enfermeras, policías, distribuidores de alimentos y a toda la gente que está trabajando para ayudar a todas las personas de todo el mundo.

Doy mi agradecimiento a las personas que luchan todos los días para detener al coronavirus gracias a ellos muchos sobreviven de esa enfermedad y espero que sigan luchando día a día por sacar al mundo en adelante.

Yo doy un mensaje a la gente que no salgan de sus casas solamente que sea de emergencia y todos nos cuidemos con las medidas de seguridad.

Gracias!

**A Note of Gratitude for our Essential Educators**

I'd like to conclude by expressing my gratitude to the educators who took time out of their stressful quarantined lives to share what they are doing to support the socioemotional well-being of their bilingual and immigrant students and families. Their extraordinary efforts remind us that we must also make time to care for our teachers, as they are being stretched thin and asked to do their job in a context for which they were not prepared. Yet, they make miracles happen every day by caring for students in big and small ways, as they themselves struggle to make sense of our new COVID context. And to each of these teachers, I say gracias, благодарю вас and mèsi.



Sofia's Journey



Sofia Maxick, First Grade Teacher, Buffalo, New York

My name is Sofia Maxick, and I have been a 1st grade teacher at Windermere Boulevard Elementary School for the past 22 years. Our school is extremely special - super diverse when it comes to the large number of countries and languages represented by our students and the socio-economic differences within our community.

Five LONG weeks ago the news came and we all began a new journey. Right away, educators started planning for the upcoming academic material to make sure no student falls behind. Packets were created for hours, organized by many hands, and sent out to students' homes. Families were expected to complete pages and pages during days after days with their kids. Some of those families were working families; some had 4 kids of all different ages, completing packets on different levels, and needing help from their guardians. Things were about to get difficult due to the pandemic.

As a teacher, I thought to myself... "YES, of course I want my students to keep up, to learn, to move further in all academic areas." I also thought to myself..."YES, of course every parent will know how to teach their own children." As a mother, I stopped for a moment, took a deep

breath, and contacted every single one of the parents in my classroom, and had my first ZOOM meeting.

I asked the parents to hear me out, to ask questions, and to keep it real. At first, it felt like I was running a parent meeting...then I realized I had to stop. I asked them - "HOW ARE YOU DOING???" Forget the packets! Forget the grade level! How are YOU doing?" I had several parents in tears - they shared their feelings, their frustrations, their confusion. "They are PARENTS! They are NOT teachers! Most of them work full time - some at home, some outside of their homes", I thought. I laid it out for them - I did not care if the packets got done! I did not care if the kids read every day! I did care about their parents' calmness, and their sanity. "If the parents have it - the kids will as well! We will do this TOGETHER!!!!", I said to myself.

After offering a few suggestions about daily schedule, structure, amount of daily work, I felt that the parents needed more...their children needed MORE! So, I decided that besides these packets, I would start to ZOOM with my students daily. I needed to see them! They needed to see me! We needed each other!

So, 5 weeks had passed. What do I do with my kids to keep them going? To keep them smiling? To keep their social and emotional feelings where they should be at this tough time? I SEE THEM DAILY! After contacting a few local places, and some faraway places, several businesses were super generous and assisted me in this adventure:

On Mondays - we sing together! A music teacher took a baking tray and made magnets look like musical notes. She plays the piano, and we all sing along! All the kids are involved!

On Tuesdays and Thursdays - a local Martial Arts place lets us join in their 30 min lessons so we can exercise and know why discipline and respect is important.

On Wednesdays and Fridays - a lovely art teacher from Georgia teaches us how to paint the most amazing pictures - our students are ready for a real art gallery!

This Monday we will start listening to Michelle Obama read to us once a week!

On Friday evenings we have bedtime stories - we cuddle up with our teddy bears and get in our cozy pjs and we enjoy a good book.

A few weeks ago a local farm had a drive-thru time for kids to stop by and see animals from their cars. I gave all the parents a HINT: there will be a car sitting on the side of the road - fully decorated with our school colors and balloons! I hoped to see my kids as they drove by- 12 families came!!!! Kids were thrilled! Parents were excited! I WAS BEYOND HAPPY to see my students!!!

Last week we decided to have a SPRING HUNT! I asked all the kids to decorate their windows with SPRING things like rainbows, sun, flowers, eggs, animals - any sign of spring. My teacher assistant and I got in our decorated cars, took our students' addresses, and drove around for 3 hours beeping by their houses. We got out of our cars and SAW each of our students, we took photos of them and their window decorations - from a distance. We laughed and got our kiddos to smile!!!! Parents were so thrilled to see their kids happy!

Last week we started Google Classroom - we expect our students to work on academics for 2 hours every day. Every one of my students has successfully completed their first week - every single

expectation was met! Yes, I had to chase some families down and re-teach and remind how to get into this site and that site. However, at the end our week - EVERY child accomplished it all!!!

Our district made a commitment to our families - to make sure every child who needs food - will get it daily! Teachers deliver meals to students' families in need - daily! Our district made a

commitment to our families - to make sure each and every child who needs a device in order to be an on-line learner, will get one. Teachers made sure to connect with every family and coordinate actions. Now every single child in our school district is all set to continue their on-line learning.

Academics are important!!!! It will not, however, get done if the kids and their

parents are not OK emotionally. So, in order for one to get done, the other one is so important to pay attention to. I still have a parent meeting once a week, and majority of the parents get on that ZOOM with me late Friday nights when kids are in bed - we chat, we laugh, some cry! I keep telling them the same thing - YOU need to take care of YOU in order for YOU to take care of your babies! We can do this TOGETHER!

A Conversation with Elisa Alvarez, Associate Commissioner for the Office of Bilingual Education and World Languages, New York State Education Department



Bahar Otcu-Grillman, EdD
Mercy College

March 19, 2020 would have been the opening day of NYSABE's 43rd Annual Conference. Instead, for Nancy Villarreal de Adler and me, it was a day of a great virtual conversation with Elisa Alvarez, the newly appointed Associate Commissioner for the Office of Bilingual Education and World Languages, NYSED. The conversation would have taken place at the NYSED headquarters in Brooklyn, NYC, but due to safety concerns for COVID-19, it took place via Webex. In spite of the challenges, we had the opportunity to get a closer look at the background of Associate Commissioner Alvarez, her life and professional experiences, and her vision and strategic planning for the education of New York State English language learners (ELLs)/multilingual learners (MLs). As stated in NYSABE's annual conference theme, "Equity in Action", this interview revealed Elisa's focus on equity in education not only for ELLs/MLs, but for all learners and stakeholders in the state. During these uncertain and most challenging times, I present excerpts of this conversation with honor and a lot of hope for a promising future.

Born and raised in Washington Heights, Manhattan, and being of Dominican heritage, Elisa is the proud mother of two boys aged 24 and 21. She was taught about language, culture, and the value of education by her own parents. She proudly shared their immigration stories with us. Her father, a political activist in the Dominican Republic, fled to the USA with his family during the era of Trujillo, the dictator who ruled the country with an iron fist for more than 30 years. Not able to complete his studies in medicine in the Dominican Republic, he devoted his time and efforts upon arriving in New

York City to creating heritage clubs and social programs to unify the Dominican community in Washington Heights. It was in these gatherings that Elisa was introduced to glam poetry and solid notions of social justice. She recalled that her father was keen on not only literature and culture, but also on profound Dominican music. *"I remember that one of my favorite singers was Sonia Silvestre who would sing on social justice,"* she said. She also recalled her mother's ability to bring people together in their home and share food and space with the little bit they had. *"We struggled, we were actually poor, but we*

didn't know it," she said. Elisa believes, as her mom and dad did, that parents should tell their children their own life stories because there are not enough published stories for Dominican American children to identify with culturally.

Elisa also commented on her rich educational and professional background as a former bilingual special education teacher, school principal, and superintendent. *"I have always worked within bilingual education for our bilingual community within the world of special education,"* she said. Even though she had considered becoming a psychiatrist

or psychologist, Elisa began her professional career as a bilingual special education teacher at PS 154, District 7, NYC DOE. She expressed her appreciation for the people who had been her sources of inspiration, among them the principal of her first school.



**Elisa Alvarez, Associate Commissioner,
Office of Bilingual Education and World
Languages, NYSED**

I thank Mary Rivera, and that almost brings me to tears... she has now passed away. I think people don't realize [that people like Mary] do the work, they champion the work, and they touch other people's hearts and influence the careers of people like myself. What I learned from her and the community was to be a champion for all children. That's what got my career started. I also thank Nancy Villarreal de Adler publicly because I used to sit and listen to (her) as part of the regular audience. I remember, hanging onto every word and everything that she would present. [I listened to] others that were in the fight with her for the betterment of children. I need to make it public that I'm very fortunate that (NYSABE) members, such as Nancy, began and paved the way for me to have a voice and have a seat at the table.

Elisa added that early on in her career she was touched by the difficulties that parents of ELLs with special needs were

facing in getting the appropriate assessments and the best instruction and support services for their children. Elisa saw the parents' challenging situations, ***"more from a social justice point of view and I never deviated from it,"*** she said.

Asked about her vision for bilingual education and ELLs/multilingual learners, Elisa replied:

"I'd like to maintain their heritage, and respect their cultures and who they are." She also affirmed her commitment to ***"researching current policies and practices to build upon them to ensure equity, fairness and social justice for our children. A lot of the work has been laid as a foundation and my goal is to address the overarching goal making sure that our children have equitable access to quality education... so they can graduate high school and attend the colleges of their choice or pursue careers elsewhere. I want them to be absolutely prepared beyond what anyone else had expected."***

In relation to NYS Seal of Biliteracy, she stated that one of the things to think about is how to strengthen the Seal of Biliteracy for our children. ***"We just published a report that would talk a bit about the development of the Seal of Biliteracy and the children who have been recipients of the Seal. We discovered that it was intended as another vehicle for ELLs to succeed, unfortunately, in many states including New York..., it is not being awarded to our children (ELLs)."*** Elisa commented that one of the mechanisms to address this issue is ***"to investigate why the Seal of Biliteracy... was not being implemented as expected... What can we, as a state entity, do to implement and support (the Seal of Biliteracy)? Is it that we don't have sufficient teachers for this work? Do we need to prepare them in a different fashion? What is it that we***

have to do?" she asked herself. She also stated, ***"The evidence that we have in the data is that the children who participate in dual language programs and receive the Seal of Biliteracy are not ELLs per se. And that's an area of concern."***

In relation to world languages and bilingual programs, Elisa had this to say:

We are currently looking at aligning standards; we are looking at how to provide support to the teachers; what professional development looks like for them. My overall goal would be to be able to bring back exams at the level of the Regents exams to demonstrate proficiency and challenge our children, so that they can receive those credentials. That should also be an additional pathway for our children to succeed. We do not have enough bilingual programs being offered and opened throughout the state. New York State is an area of concern for me as it seems to be falling behind in many aspects when it comes to our ELLs. I'm focusing more on dual language programs, offering the opportunity for all learners especially our ELLs, to be engaged in that level of intense coursework that would allow them to develop their first language as well as English. Our goal is to use correctly the resources that we have to make sure that our children graduate as they should graduate, able to perform at the university level. My goal would be to be able to move away from remediation courses for our children by the time that they achieve the university levels, so as not to waste any time. One other thing we would like to do in one of our programs is to find a way or request that (high school) children start receiving course work from the universities to build a career foundation.

Elisa went on to discuss what she has seen as a bilingual special educator. In her words, ***"One of the areas we would***

like to tackle through research is to look at true disability in speech and language and differentiate it from a second language acquisition issue. We feel that a majority of our children are overrepresented in that category and if we are able to assist professionals in making the distinction between speech and language disability vs the second language development process, we are going to avoid misconceptions or misidentification. I truly think that we have to change the entire process so our children can receive [the appropriate pedagogical practices and the services] they need."

Another concern expressed by Elisa is related to the needs of districts and schools in geographical areas outside of New York City. She acknowledged that, *"there is a crucial amount of support needed there."* In addition to working closely with the NYSED Assistant Commissioner of Special Education and Innovation and the Regional Bilingual Education Resource Networks (R-BERNS), she is interested in building **network relationships** with educational administrators, especially school principals, to strengthen districts. *"If we are able to engage them in learning and understanding about what the needs and challenges of ELLs are, by the time we walk away from them we know that each administrator is going to impact at least 500 children, maybe 1500 children."*

In relation to parent engagement, Elisa mentioned that as a former school principal, she knows that listening to families has always been, and continues to be, crucial in her daily work. She added that *"every parent has one similar goal, they want to educate their children. So, in this position, I would like to be able to open up lines of communication so that families have access to us. Beyond being able to make a phone call, I'm more of a person that wants to travel and reach out*

to parents. Communication and contact are essential for people to understand how much we need each other... Even though it is changing because of this COVID-19, we have to make sure that we have communications with the families right now. How do we reach the family? I build relationships with organizations and faith based leaders of the community because a family will always have communications with hospitals, missions, and their faith based leaders. How do we continue relationships with them so they can have access to us? ... it really is about having that personal connection with the families... We'll continue to research and develop brochures and articles so all leaders and district leaders can use them to help build the relationships with the families. I also want them (parents) to know that they have a team of people who love their children and are ready, willing, and able to work with them."

When asked about a successful experience or a lesson learned from experience, Elisa responded that she is her harshest critic and that to her, success means being able to sit at the decision-making table. From her mistakes, she says that she has learned how to identify people's strengths, provide them with opportunities to use those strengths, and have a positive impact upon their work.

When asked about the message that she would have liked to share at the NYSABE 2020 conference, Elisa replied emphatically that she wanted everyone to know that she is their *servant/ leader*:

I've been given a gift to be in a position, to be their voice, and I want everyone to know that... I want to hear them, I need to hear them. I need to hear their guidance so that I'll know that I am going in the right direction. I can unify their world, so they can continue to love, protect and educate the children... through God's

grace. He has brought me to this point to allow me to go through the pain, struggle, and suffering of the families, having lived through the inequities myself and having felt the pain of it... When I was a child, I was one of those children that would walk with my mom holding her hand and someone would turn on the street and say 'Speak English' because my mother was speaking Spanish to me. My children have had special needs themselves. I know what it is like to be a child of an immigrant family, I know what it is like to be a mother of children who need special services and to have been disregarded.

We ended our conversation with a final note on the screen from Nancy: ***"Elisa be assured that you're not standing alone, we have an army throughout the state. I will share with you the names of our soldiers."*** Ms. Alvarez was touched and said that she was honored. She reiterated that she is here to serve, then added: ***"NYSABE is an organization that has to be protected ...It's a very special organization."***



Guidance from NYSED



Gliset Colón, PhD
NYSABE Delegate-at-Large
The Bilingual Times Editor

On May 13, 2020, the New York State Education Department (NYSED) released a memorandum outlining the provision of services to English language learners and world languages students during the COVID-19 pandemic. While NYSED intends to be as flexible as possible, federal and state laws will guide the provision of services to English language learners (ELLs) and multilingual learners (MLLs). The document clearly states that school districts must continue to support the continuity of learning and the needs

of ELLs/MLLs with and without disabilities, by continuing to provide ENL, Bilingual Education, and other services mandated by Part 154, to the furthest extent possible. It is important to note that this requirement also applies to those students for whom a formal identification process was not conducted due to COVID-19 closures and have not yet been formally identified as ELLs, but who may benefit from such support.

Districts may provide families with the home language questionnaire (HLQ) in digital form for parents/guardians to complete and submit electronically. Interviews with students and their parents/guardians may be conducted remotely. Language access obligations under federal and state law must remain in place. In other words, districts must communicate regularly with staff, students and families regarding the delivery of educational services to all ELLs/MLLs. More specifically, communication with parents/guardians should be provided in the language preference of the students' families. School districts

are expected to support and protect students' emotional well-being during COVID-19-related school closures. There is specific guidance in the document that addresses units of study going forward since the 2020 New York State English As A Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT) has been cancelled. NYSED has also released guidance for graduation requirements of world language students and those seeking the New York State Seal of Biliteracy (NYSSB) in the 2019-20 school year.

Please refer to the full guidance document for more detailed information and a review of the emergency regulatory changes as a result of COVID-19. The document can be found at: <http://www.nysed.gov/common/nysed/files/programs/coronavirus/nysed-covid-19-memo-qa-provision-services-ells-world-languages-students.pdf>. Additional resources for educators can be found at: <http://www.nysed.gov/edtech/educator-resources>.



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New York State Association for Bilingual Education

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NYSABE
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THE ORGANIZATION:

NYSABE is a multilingual, multicultural professional association that promotes the academic achievement of more than 300,000 English language learners (ELLs)/bilingual students, and supports the development of biliteracy skills among all students in New York State. Founded in 1976, NYSABE unites educators, parents, community and business leaders, elected officials, researchers, members of professional organizations, educational institutions, and the news media sharing a common goal-to ensure excellence and equity for students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

NYSABE encourages the establishment, maintenance, and expansion of quality programs in bilingual education.

NYSABE promotes bilingual education as a process by which students achieve academic success through instruction in English and a language other than English. NYSABE supports the belief that language pluralism and literacy in more than one language benefit the nation and all its citizens.

NYSABE collaborates with the NYS Education Department, school districts, and educational institutions by participating in their initiatives and ensuring excellence and equity in the education of ELLs /bilingual learners. NYSABE is affiliated with the National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE) and the New York State Council of Educational Associations (NYSCEA).

MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS:

Join the NYSABE team! Through your membership dues and involvement, you will have the opportunity to make integral contributions towards positive educational change for ELLs/bilingual learners.

Membership benefits include:

NYSABE Journal of Multilingual Education Research (JMERE): The yearly issue of this journal is a must for every library and member of the association. It publishes current research on best practices in instructional methodologies, optimum program models, and key elements in the implementation of successful bilingual education programs.

The NYSABE Newsletter, The Bilingual Times: The quarterly issues of The Bilingual Times offer updates on the regional and statewide activities of the association and its members. The Bilingual Times also provides information on current legislative and policy developments as well as articles on best educational approaches for ELLs/bilingual learners.

Professional Development: NYSABE offers local, regional, and statewide professional development activities that focus on optimum, research-based practices in bilingual education. These activities create a professional forum suitable to network with other professionals in your field of interest, to share experiences, and explore new ideas.

Advocacy and Leadership: NYSABE offers opportunities to develop leadership skills while participating in hands-on training, special committees, language group events, and advocacy activities on behalf of students, their parents, and educators.

NYSABE wishes to thank all of our contributors and supporters for lending their expertise to this publication.

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**The New York State
Association for
Bilingual Education**