# Examining Dual-Language as a Tool for Equity Through an Adaptive Leadership Lens

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Examining Dual-Language as a Tool for Equity
Through an Adaptive Leadership Lens




Doctor of Education Leadership (Ed.L.D.)
Capstone








Submitted by

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**Abstract**

This capstone outlines my strategic project on advancing the work of opening a dual-language school, beginning at the elementary level, in Bellingham Public Schools. The school district currently has a well-defined support program for English-language learners, the largest number of whom are Spanish speakers. However, while dual-language models have been shown to support academic development for all students as well as the English development of second-language students, Bellingham does not currently have such a model in place. I sought first to understand the history of ELL and dual-language in Bellingham Public Schools to best comprehend the potential barriers to opening a two-way dual-language school soon. Three immediate concerns posed potential barriers to opening a dual-language school in the district: 1) resource and staffing allocation, 2) the history of neighborhood schools that could be disrupted if a new school model was adopted, and most critically, 3) questions of equity and equitable access to such a program.

This capstone describes the strategies and tactics I used to lead a team during the first phase of Bellingham's dual language planning, as well as the theoretical frameworks that informed my leadership (Moore, 1995; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). Our goal was to explore the viability of the program in the context of this district, and advocate for a model most likely to succeed here. The team designed and made initial proposals for a school that would consider the above challenges while adhering to the values, beliefs, mission, and vision of the Bellingham Public Schools. As a result of this work, continued structured discussions are scheduled to happen with a wider stakeholder group, the leaders of the elementary schools, and their communities. Given the nature of how change is led and managed in Bellingham, executive endorsement for continued planning and strategic discussions marks a significant step towards opening a dual-language school in an upcoming school year.

**Chapter 1: Introduction**

**Leadership and the Promise a Community Makes to Itself**

Bellingham Public Schools is a PreK-12 school district in northwestern Washington state. The school district has 11,900 students, making it the 29th largest school district in the state and the largest in Whatcom County. The school district is comprised of twenty-two schools including three comprehensive and one alternative high school, and a 23rd site that hosts the Family Partnership Program supporting homeschooling families. Approximately 67% of the students identify as White or of European descent, with 16% identifying as Hispanic or Latino, 5.6% identifying as Asian, and the remaining 11% identifying as either African-American, Indigenous, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, or more than one race (OSPI, 2019).

*Figure 1: The Bellingham Promise (2019)*



When I arrived in Bellingham, I was able to meet several school and district leaders and visit several classrooms. Everywhere I went, I saw posters entitled *The Bellingham Promise,* translated into multiple languages and hung on the walls (Figure 1). In

my career, I have visited many districts and often seen something resembling "The Promise" on cork boards, in break rooms, or linked on district websites. But in Bellingham, this strategic document felt uniquely alive and front-of-mind. People in every setting spoke of "The Promise" and from what I could discern, they did so with ownership and enthusiasm.

I asked about this and the responses impressed me. The Bellingham Promise was a direct result of Superintendent Dr. Greg Baker's entry into the district ten years prior. When he assumed the helm in 2010, Dr. Baker publicly shared his entry plan and embarked on a listening tour of the district. He ambitiously set out to hear from all stakeholder groups and visit every classroom in the district. He met with union representatives, site leaders, parents, indigenous communities and business leaders seeking to understand the assets and the needs of the school community in an effort to best serve the students of Bellingham. These hundreds, if not thousands, of conversations informed The Bellingham Promise. Despite its origins with Dr. Baker's entry, the people I spoke with did not see this strategic plan as the superintendent's promise to the district. The Bellingham Promise was the community's promise to itself. It was generated in collaboration and over many drafts, with input and feedback from all corners of Bellingham. What emerged in the end was a tight, explicit, and vetted document that serves as the north star for this district in both its daily operations and its grand vision.

Throughout my first few months in Bellingham, I noticed that the Promise was referenced regularly by members of the community in all different roles. Also, it was regularly referred to as a "living document" subject to annual review, and frequently undergoes small revisions. The Bellingham Promise used during my residency year

featured a significant update from the previous version. For the first time, the Promise included explicit language expressing a commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Dr. Baker later told me that he had always felt that equity was an implicit but essential element of the district's philosophy, embedded in the "one schoolhouse" principle of the Promise. When contemplating resource allocation and district-wide decisions, the "one schoolhouse" philosophy directs the district to "provide equitable distribution of resources and services to ensure excellence for all students" (*Figure 2*). In Dr. Baker's estimation, equity had always been paramount. It was simply time to provide the community with more explicit details about how equity informed the district's



*Figure 2: The Bellingham Promise (2010)*

practices. The newly added language states, "We envision and strive for a more diverse, inclusive and equitable organization. Focus areas include, but are not limited to, race and ethnicity, gender identity and sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, ability, language and culture" (*Promise*, 2019).

The new equity statement was developed over several years of deep and introspective work by district and school personnel. All district administrators, school

leaders, and teachers participated in book studies to investigate the ways inequity persists within the system. Administrators and teachers alike analyze and evaluate their roles, perhaps both unconscious and unintentional, in perpetuating inequity in the district. Books like *Helping Children Succeed* by Paul Tough, *White Fragility* by Robin DiAngelo, and *Effective Inclusive Schools* by Lauren Katzman and Tom Hehir have fueled deep discussions about equity in the schools and classrooms of Bellingham Public Schools.

Under Dr. Baker's leadership, the district has seen successes, but also faced several challenges, particularly in addressing achievement gaps between various student subgroups. The district has made significant gains in graduation rates of all students over the past several years. The overall graduation rate rose from 78.6% to 87% between the years 2014 to 2018. For Hispanic students specifically, that graduation rate increased even more significantly, from 64.3% to 77.1%, and ELL student graduation rates increased by approximately 15% over the same period.

Meanwhile, in response to a 2010 internal audit of the program supporting English language learners (ELLs), BPS dedicated significant resources to improving these services. The district created more ELL support teacher positions and elevated the ELL lead to a director-level position, which may have also contributed to the rising graduation rates. Despite this improvement, the gaps persist in graduation rates for subgroups of students by race, language, poverty and disability, and these gaps are also apparent in student achievement data (Washington State Report Card, 2019). The question persists of how to best close the achievement gap for these students.

The possibility of opening a dual-language program predates Dr. Baker's arrival in the district, though in those early years the idea was only explored in a limited manner. After the ELL audit and resource reallocation during his first year, Dr. Baker continued researching best practices for supporting second-language learners. Because of the robust research in favor of dual-language programming, he soon joined the supporters of opening a dual-language school in Bellingham. Various advocates pursued dual language initiatives in subsequent years, but none proved sustainable. In November 2018, Dr. Baker sponsored a team of ten educators from the classroom level, site leadership, and executive cabinet, to attend *La Cosecha,* the national conference on dual language, in New Mexico. The hope was that this team might discover practical models and learn more about the possible implementation of dual language in Bellingham. While several of these educators shared with me that they had experienced frustration at not being able to move this work beyond the conversation stage, this conference visit marked a significant elevation of the subject.

The district has dedicated significant resources to supporting students who come to Bellingham needing to learn English. English language learners (ELLs) currently make up 7.3% of the total student population, or approximately 800 students. These students represent dozens of languages, with the largest proportion (roughly 50% of ELLs) having Spanish as their first language (Washington State Report Card, 2019).

After my introduction to the district and the members of the leadership team, Dr. Baker and I began to discuss possible strategic projects for my residency, focusing on key strategies and desired outcomes for equity, culture, and language embedded in the *Bellingham Promise*. The *Promise* states that the district will graduate students who are

"multilingual and multiliterate," and that students will be "respectful and compassionate humans." A core belief statement reads, "[Diversity] enhances a strong and healthy community." And of course, the newly adopted key strategy for the district includes a commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion. Initially, we discussed the possibility of exposing all students to world languages in immersive multicultural settings, along with a possible reimagination of middle and high school foreign language programs. We finally settled on the viability of opening a dual-language school. Knowing that some educators already felt passionate about such a program, and preliminary work had been done to imagine it, I was charged with bringing together these advocates to explore further. Dr. Baker was convinced enough of the project's value after his initial exploration but had yet to be presented with a plan that could answer his specific concerns. This tension would guide our work.

The strategic project described in this capstone examines an effort to make system-level change in a district so that the district can be more inclusive, strategic, and culturally responsive. Further in the paper, I outline the granular detail involved in this project. My initial description of this project is as follows: I would lead a group of educators from different positions within the system to come together as a team, answer outstanding questions, and use those answers to persuade those with authority in the system to endorse a change, in this case to open a dual-language school. As I planned and implemented this project, I drew on three bodies of research, which I describe in the following Review of Knowledge for Action. First, I examine the research supporting the dual-language approach to schooling as a means of eliminating the achievement gap between English-language learners and their native English-speaking peers. Second, I

present evidence for dual-language schooling as a means of affirming cultural-linguistic

identities in children. Lastly, I review research on systems leadership and change

management. These three streams of literature together informed the change work of this

strategic project, which I discuss in greater detail later in the paper.

**Chapter 2: Required Knowledge for Action (RKA)**

In preparation for this strategic project, I explored the research on three foundational topics, and outline key takeaways from each in the sections that follow. The first section reviews evidence that effective dual-language programming supports student achievement and, specifically, can mitigate achievement gaps between second-language learners and native English speakers. The second section outlines research supporting the dual-language approach as a means of affirming the cultural and linguistic identities within diverse populations. As this strategic project is intended to support the district's recently adopted equity initiative, I also investigate practices shown to advance equity, particularly for marginalized language groups. Finally, this strategic project is informed by perspectives on ways to lead change in a system that require more than implementation of a program, but instead emphasize ways to adapt to new approaches to ongoing work. I conclude the section by describing the strategic frameworks I chose to lead change that creates public value in a complex public system.

As stated above, the most common first language among Bellingham's English-language learners (ELLs) is Spanish, representing roughly 385 students concentrated in greatest numbers in the northern part of the city. Since hiring additional ELL support specialists – a significant fiscal expenditure, with each additional full-time equivalent (FTE) job costing approximately $125,000 – Bellingham Public Schools has made significant strides in increasing the graduation rate for Spanish-speaking students. However, there is still a persistent achievement gap on academic outcomes as measured by the state assessment, the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) test. While graduation rates have increased dramatically, particularly for students self-

identified as Latina(o)/Hispanic, achievement scores over that time have failed to reach those of their native English-speaking peers.

**Dual language and student achievement**

Between 2014 and 2018, the graduation rate for English-language learners increased from 48.6% to 63.8%. Clearly, the district is making progress with these groups. However, the SBAC score gap between English speakers and non-English speakers has not changed significantly; in fact, the gap between students designated "white" and those designated "Hispanic/Latino" has increased slightly over this same period (Washington State Report Card, 2019). The Bellingham school district prides itself on assessing the success of its children using many more measures than simply state test scores. However, if closing the achievement gap between Spanish-speaking students and native English speakers is among the district's goals, then dual-language programs merit consideration.

In the United States, the longest running continuous research on closing the achievement gap for second-language learners has been conducted by Virginia Collier and Wayne Thomas of George Mason University. They recently updated their findings from over three decades of study in a 2017 report entitled "Validating the Power of Bilingual Schooling: Thirty-two years of Large-Scale Longitudinal Research." Collier and Thomas reaffirm the unparalleled value of teaching language minority (LM) students in both the target language (L2) and their first language (L1), writing, "Along with fellow researchers across the world, we continue to find in each study that we conduct that the most powerful predictor of LM student achievement in L2 is nonstop development of students' L1 through the school curriculum (including schooling through the L2, usually

the dominant language of the host country)" (p. 204). In earlier research on programs in Texas and Maine, Collier and Thomas (2004) found the following:

> "Both one-way and two-way bilingual programs lead to grade-level and above-grade-level achievement in second language, the only programs that fully close the gap.  Groups of English learners attending one-way bilingual classes typically reach grade level achievement in second language by 7th or 8th grade, scoring slightly above grade level through the remainder of their schooling.  With the stimulus of native-English-speaking peers in two-way bilingual classes, groups of English learners typically reach grade level achievement in second language by 5th or 6th grade, reaching an average of the 61st NCE or the 70th percentile by the eleventh grade" (Collier and Thomas, 2004, p. 11).

The reasons for this are multiple. First and foremost is that continued L1 development offers consistent access to relevant content as L2 language development takes place. Learning a language without context is difficult, so continually expanding students' awareness of content while developing L2 proficiency is helpful, if not critical. This finding is supported in other studies; for example, Smith and Arnot-Hopfer (1998) report, "[Dual-Language Immersion (DLI)] allows Spanish dominant students to gain important content knowledge that will make the English they encounter more comprehensible; and it enhances overall cognitive and social development" (p. 261).

Not only do ELL students in dual language programs show improved academic results in English, but, in fact, all students in such programs can benefit from gaining bilingual and biliterate skills. DeMatthews and Kotok (2018) argue that dual-language programs support diversity and equity while improving academic outcomes. Citing research from Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, and Christian (2005), they state, "Additional research has shown that ELLs instructed through English and their primary language achieve at or above their peers on standardized tests and benefit from biliteracy,

while bilingual children in traditional English immersion programs lose or do not make progress in their native language" (DeMatthews & Kotok, 2018, p. 2).

One common finding across studies is that while a high quality dual-language intervention can shrink or eliminate an achievement gap, it requires time and patience. In the initial years, while students gain oral and some written proficiency in two languages, their performance indicators will likely lag behind their English-speaking counterparts (Lindholm-Leary, 2012). How long will it take for the positive results to show themselves? "The answer to this question is that it takes a long time—an average of 6 years for those who start in kindergarten and receive quality dual-language schooling in both L1 and L2 for a minimum of 6 years, with at least half of the instructional time in their L1" (Thomas & Collier, 2017, p. 207). This is a challenge to note for those who intend to implement such a program. Communicating the need for patience while students gain momentum will be critical. The rewards will come, however. "[A]lmost all evaluations conducted at the end of elementary school and in middle and high school showed that the educational outcomes of bilingually educated students, especially in late-exit and two-way programs, were at least comparable to, and usually higher than, their comparison peers" (Genesee et al., 2005, p. 375)). What we often see in schooling, when dual language is not implemented, is even more costly to the students. "It takes still longer, 7–10 years or more, if students have *not* had the opportunity to be schooled in their L1, and many in this situation do not reach grade-level achievement and are often referred to by school personnel as 'long-term English learners'" (Thomas & Collier, 2017, p. 207).

Aside from dual language approaches, most school systems enroll ELL students in either a transitional bilingual education program (BE), or, in "English-only" environments like Arizona, a structured (or sheltered) English immersion program (SEI). According to Thomas and Collier (2003), these options are less effective. In their study, ELLs achieved slightly higher scores in typical BE programs than in SEIs, but neither program model resolved more than half of the achievement gap between ELLs and native English speakers. Only dual-language instruction consistently eliminated achievement gaps.

**Language Identity, Advancing Equity, and Cultural-linguistic Affirmation**

To inform the work of planning a dual-language school in Bellingham, I also reviewed research on equity advancement in schools, particularly as it relates to cultural responsiveness and linguistic identity as a fundamental component of cultural identity. Immigrant students in American school systems are often viewed through a deficit lens – e.g., the belief that they specifically lack English proficiency, and it is our responsibility to fill the hole they have – instead of celebrating and embracing them as assets to our system who provide rich cultural experiences and diversify perspectives within our communities (Kotok & DeMatthews, 2018). I do not argue that learning English is wrong or less important than cultural inclusiveness. It is a necessary skill for full participation in American life. However, filling this gap is insufficient in our approach to confronting the racism experienced by immigrant students.

In addition to improving academic outcomes for all students, dual-language instruction embodies the values of a multicultural society. In traditional ELL programs, English learners are treated as having a deficit: they lack English proficiency. They are

not treated as assets who are models of their second language and emerging multilinguals. When schools treat English as the dominant language and ELLs as defective in that skill, they predispose teachers and native English speaking students to view ELLs as "less than" or "not as able." In contrast, dual-language programming affirms the cultural and linguistic gifts all students bring with them to school (Forman, 2016).

Culture is first transmitted and received at home between parents and their children and continues to develop and mature as students enter the larger world of school and society. To engage fully in cultural development with their parents as they grow, children must also continue to advance in their understanding of the first language. If children mature in an academic institution devoid of their first language, they are at risk for significant developmental challenges. "Five-year olds are brilliant little sociologists," says Dr. Carl Hermanns, professor of education at Arizona State University. He explained to me in a personal conversation that even very young students can recognize the power dynamics of the institution of school. Traditional programs imply that English is the language of power, causing many students to distance themselves from their own linguistic identity[1]. Incidentally, but not insignificantly, the students' English-speaking peers receive an inverse message that *affirms* their own linguistic identity, unintentionally exacerbating the problem.

First language deprivation can also stunt children's relationships with their parents and, by extension, with their home culture. If a child stops developing in their first language when they enter school, typically at age five, and their parents speak

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[1] Personal Interview with Carl Hermanns, Ed.D., October 25, 2019.

limited conversational English, then communication between the parent and student cannot surpass this basic level, according to Dr. Hermanns. Perhaps unconsciously, children and parents experience a schism that is both rooted in their difficulty in communicating at a maturing level, and in the child's association of power with the dominant language of English.

Fortunately, dual-language instruction can meet both needs when administered with high-quality practices. Students can access the dominant linguistic culture while strengthening their original language identity. Another benefit of dual-language instruction is that native-English speakers can develop a similar mindset about the language they are learning, as they will have both access to that linguistic culture and will see that language being used by people in power. Kotok and DeMatthews (2018) cite the work of Valenzuela (1999) to support this, writing, "Being a language or culture broker contrasts with a deficit model where non-White and/or ELLs are made to feel inadequate resulting in lower self-esteem and efficacy" (p.2). Colombian researchers Yaneth Rodríguez-Tamayo and Lino Maria Tenjo-Macias (2018) also cite the significance of dual-language instruction for identity formation:

> "[I]t is very important to recognize that students may have family members who speak other languages and who may motivate the child to speak their native language more. It is very important that children can communicate in their parents' native language because if they don't, they may not value their parents' heritage. Consequently, they may not grow up identifying themselves with their parents' heritage. If the language is not part of their lives, the children will forget a piece of who they are" (p. 98).

Learning in one language at school and a different one at home is challenging, but it need not challenge the child's sense of self-worth, nor to their connection to their family and their heritage. There are many ways to affirm students' cultural and linguistic identities.

Even when economies of scale make it impossible to create dual-language programs for every student's language, districts must do what they can to explicitly affirm their value to the school community as a whole (Collier & Thomas, 2017; Kotok & DeMatthews, 2018; Rodriguez & Tenjo-Macias, 2019). Wherever it is possible, dual-language programming is the best way to elevate ELL students' status in schools.

Finally, as an instrument of advancing equity and integration, dual-language instruction is a powerful tool. Collier and Thomas (2003) claim that "dual-language programs also provide integrated, inclusive, and unifying education experiences for their students, in contrast to… traditional English-only and transitional bilingual programs. The atmosphere of inclusiveness in the dual-language milieu meets the cultural needs of minorities and provides opportunities for them to experience the world of their nonminority peers" (p. 63). Beyond the easily quantifiable outcomes of test scores, dual-language schooling promotes the values of equity, diversity, and inclusion.

In summary, dual-language programming has at least two benefits. First, clear longitudinal research supports the use of dual-language instruction for raising the educational outcomes for both native and non-native English speakers. Second, the advantages go beyond academic achievements. Dual language also supports cultural identity formation, access to power for minoritized students, and integration and unity among diverse student populations.

**Leading Adaptive Change in Organizations**

The third body of research supporting this work is in the field of leading groups through change, and the work required to successfully navigate the risks inherent in leadership. I start with a broad look at what creates a healthy culture in an organization.

From there, I examine why change is challenging, even in healthy organizations. I then

review Mark Moore's (1995) framework for creating public value; a seminal study of

group dynamics by Smith and Berg (1995); and Ron Heifetz's and Martin Linsky's

(2017) framework for leadership of groups. Each of these works informed my approach

to leading people and systems during my strategic project.

In 1995, Mark Moore brought clarity to the concept of the creation of public

value. Value creation was a familiar idea in private industry, but Moore was among the

first to apply this entrepreneurial thinking to the public sector, including the public

education system. As this project is an entrepreneurial venture of a kind within the

Bellingham school district, Moore's framework is useful for tackling the work.

According to Moore, the public manager seeking to create new public value should "test

the adequacy of their vision of organizational purpose" using three questions that

represent what he calls the *strategic triangle* (see Figure 3). Moore instructs us to attend

to "whether the purpose is publicly valuable, whether it will be politically and legally

supported, and whether it is administratively and operationally feasible" as we strategize

and analyze progress (p. 22).

Moore's first strategic area refers to the *public value* being given to or created for

the community; a successful organization "produces things of value to overseers, clients, and beneficiaries at low cost in terms of money and authority" (p. 71). The second leg of Moore's triangle, or the *authorizing environment*, represents an initiative that is
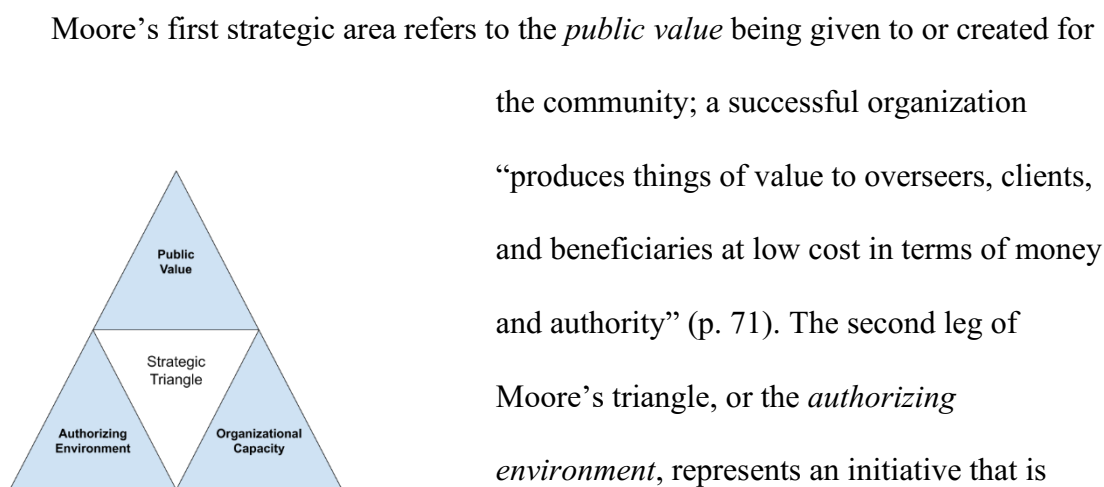


Figure 3: Mark Moore's Strategic Triangle

"legitimate and politically sustainable… able to continually attract both authority and money from the political authorizing environment to which it is ultimately accountable" (Moore, 1995, p. 71).  Focusing on this piece of the strategy means keeping in mind the messaging to the community, particularly as it is represented by the school board and, more importantly given the governmental structure of Bellingham, gaining the support of the chief executive, Dr. Baker. Finally, public leaders should be sure that the work is "operationally and administratively feasible" (Moore, 1995, p. 71).

Each of Moore's strategic areas affects the long-term viability of the opening of a dual-language school in the district. My focus, for this initial phase of the work, was on determining the administrative and operational feasibility of the project. The work beyond this phase focused on the public value and political viability of the project. As Moore says, our work as public managers requires us to "become strategists rather than technicians" (p. 20).

For my phase of the work and the strategic project, the focus was to bring together a team of educators from various places within the district organization to assess the district's organizational capacity for a dual-language school and, to a lesser degree, the public value it would generate. The group convened to do this work was diverse in responsibility, role, and level of commitment to the project. As such, I anticipated we would face some of the challenges that typically accompany this kind of group work. Smith and Berg (1997) describe the central challenge of working groups in their psycho-social analysis of groups, *Paradoxes of Group Life*. One of their central claims, and the one that is most relevant to this work, is the key paradox of group work: on the one hand, there are certain problems that only a group can solve; on the other hand, once the group

is convened, it will, by nature, resist the very change it was organized to enact (Smith and Berg, 1997). This paradox centers around how conflict is treated within the group. If we treat conflict as a valuable resource for solving problems, then our chances of success improve. In Bellingham, the challenge of opening a dual-language school that addresses Dr. Baker's concerns required us to convene educators from all levels of the organization. Yet, if Smith and Berg were right, this group would need to resist the pull to only talk about the need for change in lieu of actually addressing the challenges. It would take leadership to overcome this potential obstacle. Another conflict in our group was between those who saw themselves as "fully committed" to the change, and those who were willing to question the value of opening a dual-language school and were treated like opponents by their peers. Smith and Berg (1997) advise leaders in similar situations that "If the opposition is seen as a natural part of the very concept of commitment, the same being part of itself, [this enriches] everyone's understanding of what commitment means" (p. 47). This leadership challenge informed my second framework for guiding the project.

Leadership scholars Ron Heifetz and Marty Linsky (2017) outline steps that increase the likelihood of successful organizational change within human systems. One of the central principles of their leadership theory is that there are two kinds of challenges: technical and adaptive. Distinguishing between these two types of challenges was central to the work of my strategic project. Technical problems are those for which we "have the necessary know-how and procedures" (Heifetz & Linsky, 2017, p. 13). However, adaptive challenges "require experiments, new discoveries, and adjustments from *numerous places in the organization*" [emphasis added] (Heifetz & Linsky, 2017, p. 13).

The authors note that although managers often attempt to apply technical solutions to adaptive problems, they rarely meet with success. Effective adaptive change requires those who are experiencing the problem to internalize the change. This does not happen with technical change.

Fortunately for this project, the executive leadership at Bellingham has adopted Heifetz's Adaptive Leadership framework, creating a common language for analyzing and addressing the problems at hand. According to Heifetz and Linsky (2017), adaptive leaders rely on several key strategies. First, they engage the work from at least two altitudes: sometimes on the metaphorical dance floor, sometimes seeing the system from the balcony level. "The only way you can gain both a clearer view of reality and some perspective on the bigger picture is by distancing yourself from the fray" (p. 53). A second critical strategy is orchestrating conflict capable of producing change. This involves creating a safe and trusting environment while also "raising the temperature" of the conflict at times and lowering it at others. All the while, the leader must be able to help the group see the future possibilities (p. 102). Finally, the leader must remember to give the work back to those who are closest to the work. This was particularly important for me as an outsider serving in a facilitative capacity. For this to succeed, the work must be owned by those who are in the best position to understand it and execute upon our decisions.

These two frames helped center my work on this strategic project. Our goal was to create public value in the form of a dual-language school. We needed to assess and create organizational capacity to do this. Finally, this work needed to be guided by an understanding of the unique challenges of solving adaptive problems.

**Problem of Practice:**

My original problem of practice was the problem we identified in our Bilingual Action Team (see description below). While this problem did govern our work as a team, it is not precisely the same as the problem I ended up engaging to lead system-level change. Therefore, my revised problem of practice for this strategic project reads as follows:

- *While considerable progress has been made in creating a robust system to support English-language learners in Bellingham Public Schools, an achievement gap between Spanish speakers and their native English peers persists. Programmatic solutions exist that research suggests are effective in other contexts yet are particularly difficult to scale in the context of Bellingham.  The question remains of how to address the needs of all children who come to Bellingham as language learners with a range of programmatic approaches.*

With this problem of practice in mind, my theory of change reads:

If I:

- Gather a team of educators from multiple levels of Bellingham Public Schools (BPS), from the classroom to the executive team, and

- Facilitate discussions which surface productive conflict on the various dual-language models that can best meet the academic and social-emotional needs of our students,

- While giving the ownership of the change to those closest to the work, and

- Help the team surface problems with each model and decide upon the best model(s) to explore given Bellingham's context, and

- Garner the support of all the members of the bilingual action committee, particularly the members of the executive team,

Then we:

- Can submit for consideration to Dr. Baker a set of recommendations that
    - Addresses questions of access,
    - Plans for resource allocation (transportation, curriculum, human talent),
    - Forecasts a plan to scale the implementation of dual language to more students in the district, and
    - The costs inherent in making these recommended choices will be owned by more actors across the system; and
- Dr. Baker will be convinced that further discussions regarding the viability and value of such a program should continue in Bellingham; and
- The school district will adopt a more formal process of inquiry that involves a wider swath of the community in the discussion about a possible dual-language school.

So that

- Bellingham Public Schools can design and implement a program that affirms the language identify of our Spanish-speaking students, and
- The achievement gap between Spanish-speaking students and English-speaking students will be eliminated in keeping with the district's commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion.

## Chapter 3: Description of the Project

The objective of my change project was to lead a team of people who would eventually design and open a dual-language school in Bellingham Public Schools. The long-term goal would be to open the school, but the scope of this project was on a much tighter timeline, so the criteria for success was different. The specific goal of my work was to get enough clarity and support from the executive team, and Dr. Baker specifically, to continue discussing a dual-language program in a more formal manner. Early on, Dr. Baker told me there had been some support and momentum in Bellingham for several years to open such a school. However, doing so would challenge some of the current practices in the district, specifically, a history of resisting specialized schools for specialized populations in favor of a broad, robust educational model that grants similar options to all students. No proposals thus far had been detailed enough to persuade Dr. Baker to move forward in this process.

In 2019, the district took its first significant step forward, though it may not have been apparent to everyone at the time. Dr. Baker supported a team of ten leaders and teachers in Bellingham to attend *La Cosecha*, an annual conference on dual-language education in New Mexico. The team, which included the deputy superintendent, an executive director, principals, and teachers, came back feeling energized and motivated to move this work forward. They held a number of informal meetings over the next months to discuss the need for a dual-language school in Bellingham. Near the end of the school year, then-ELL director Bethany Barrett presented a pitch to the executive team in hopes of gaining support for opening a dual-language school.

This is the context in which Dr. Baker suggested I organize this team to clarify their thinking toward an actionable proposal. Initially, some members of the team felt disenchantment or cynicism about this work, rooted in their previous experience of attempting to push forward dual language learning and feeling thwarted in their efforts. According to some team members, they had been down this road before. Further discussion revealed that, while they may have advocated generally for a dual-language school, they had not presented a plan that fully accounted for the complexities of the Bellingham context. However, I believed they had succeeded by raising the superintendent's level of attention to the issue enough that he was willing to have a team bring him further thinking and analysis.

My first task in this work was to bring the team together. I invited the ten people who attended the 2019 conference, plus the current director of ELL programs, whose office would ostensibly be responsible for any future dual-language school. Our first meeting was scheduled to follow a standard Tuesday morning executive team meeting. In this first meeting, Dr. Baker shared with us a written list of his questions about implementing a dual language-program in Bellingham, then talked through each one (see Appendix A). Prior to his role in Bellingham, Dr. Baker worked for Portland Public Schools, which has extensive experience implementing dual-language schools. His questions anticipated potential obstacles he had learned about in Portland. While some were technical (whole school vs. track, increased staffing needs, etc.), the questions as a whole required the team to think about implications throughout the system, particularly for equitable access. They represented the challenges that must be addressed for such a program to move forward. We took this document as our guiding criteria for proposals.

Afterwards, the team debriefed and scheduled six more weekly meetings. This would take us through October and into November, when we would decide if we needed to meet again.

At this point, the team needed to clearly define its purpose. I spoke with Dr. Baker and my advisor, Dr. Irvin Scott, and we decided to think of this forming team as a kind of exploratory committee. The district has clear policies and practices for involving members of the community in change projects, but this group was not subject to those guidelines. My job was to remind this committee often that our role was totally unofficial, and any programs we imagined would simply represent our current best thinking. Our objective was clear, though:  we strove to come up with answers to all of Dr. Baker's concerns that were justifiable and plausible enough to convince him to pursue a formal inquiry.

At the start of my project, I had thought of the work I would be leading as "Phase 1" of a multi-phase, multi-year process. We hoped to open a dual-language school, but that would take two years at a minimum. There were many steps between now and then. Task forces to make specific recommendations to the superintendent, community focus groups to explore public interest in such a school, and of course a design team to handle everything from curriculum purchasing to hiring would all take place down the line. Each step was necessary, formalized, and publicly transparent. Dr. Baker, Dr. Scott, and I decided that this was "Phase Zero" — an informal investigation into the possibility and organizational capacity for opening such a school. If we were successful in Phase Zero, we would form an initial team and make a case for more formal engagement with the district at large and the wider school community.

Choosing the membership of the Phase Zero team took consideration. In addition to those who had attended the dual language conference the year before, I invited members of the executive leadership team. This served two purposes. First, it was critical for this exploratory team to have representation from all levels of the organization to provide a broad range of perspectives about the impact of this program at all levels. Two classroom teachers, two principals and an assistant principal, a director of teaching and learning, and five members of the executive team made up the group. Second, executive team members offered another benefit in their ability to quickly broaden the discussion to include more people, should Dr. Baker choose to move forward with the proposal. The community was more likely to support recommendations from a team with vantage points at all levels of the district.

With the team assembled, we scheduled our first meeting for the first of October. We were scheduled to meet for two hours each Tuesday at the end of the workday and into the evenings. Dr. Baker told me that, on multiple occasions, this group had presented their unanimous agreement regarding a need for a dual-language school. However, it was not clear that the members of the group agreed on the specifics of an eventual plan. Consequently, one of my goals in the facilitation of this group would be to collect explicit details about different school models, and surface and encourage any underlying disagreements so as to come to a solution that benefited from our collective understanding.

For the first meeting, I created an agenda with three tasks. The first task was to set norms to follow for the coming meetings. More than a perfunctory exercise in group formation, these norms would serve a very real purpose in driving the work forward. I

chose to draft the norms ahead of time, then bring them to the group, where we discussed, revised, and then voted upon them (see Appendix B). As a part of the norming process, we used a consent protocol that required all norms to be something that everyone in the room could live with or endorse. Using a consent protocol to agree to these norms was an initial exercise in the decision-making process. I planned to use this consent protocol in future meetings when it came to eventual proposals, so practicing it was important to future work. In my experience, people often endorse norms without much discussion, perhaps to move the process along. I did not want that to happen in this case, so I had asked a member of the group ahead of time to disagree with one of the norms in case nobody else did. For internal discussions, a majority would usually be sufficient to move discussion forward, but disagreeing productively over norms and coming to a consensus established early that the entire team would examine and endorse any proposals before sharing outside the group.

The second objective of this initial meeting was to clearly articulate the problem that we were trying to address. I was concerned that members of the group would think of the problem merely as the absence of a dual-language school. This was not the case. We did draft an initial problem statement in this meeting that focused on the achievement gap between Hispanic/Latinx students and their English-speaking peers. I noted some reticence in this first meeting, so we agreed to table the problem statement and revisit it the next meeting after some time to think more about it. That original draft read as follows:

> *While Bellingham Public Schools has invested significant time, money, and effort*
>
> *into developing a robust ELL support system, and improvements in services have*

*resulted in increased graduation rates among students identifying as*

*Hispanic/Latino(a), we have failed to close the achievement gap between*

*Hispanic/Latino(a) students and white students in the district.*

The final task of this first meeting was to discuss the purpose of the group, get

clear about the task, and determine criteria for success. We determined that success *for*

*this group* would mean a set of considerations that answered Dr. Baker's concerns well

enough for him to sanction more conversation. I needed to keep the group engaged in the

conflict to move past the easy answers and work to find the most effective answers. Even

though this was my intention, I did not predict how much tension would arise in future

discussions. I believe that we did arrive at better answers because of that tension and

disagreement.

In the second meeting, we revisited the problem statement and amended it to

better fit our understanding of the problem we were trying to solve. We moved from a

focus on achievement gaps to a focus on cultural affirmation. It was not that the

achievement gaps were not a concern. As discussed above, dual-language programs have

an exceptional record of success in addressing these gaps. Rather, the greater problem for

the team was that the current design of the school system was potentially guilty of erasing

the cultural and linguistic identities of our students. After we discussed, revised, and

voted on the new draft, the problem of practice read:

> *Bellingham Public Schools' current approach to supporting Spanish-speaking*
>
> *ELL students contributes to loss of language, culture and identity, leading to*
>
> *significant academic challenges. This measurable language loss among these*
>
> *students also has a significant, negative cognitive impact.*

This is an example of how engaging with ambiguity and uncertainty, rather than subduing it, leads to a more comprehensive understanding. I am confident that we produced a better result because the group was more enthusiastic in its endorsement, and they unanimously supported the new iteration of the problem of practice.

The next several meetings were spent brainstorming approaches, creating models, proposing solutions, and debating and critiquing their merits. It became clear that our knowledge could only take us so far, so in between meetings, members researched various models and implementation schemes from scholarly literature and adaptations from school districts with similar contexts to ours. I created teams to individually explore each model and become versed in its specific assets and liabilities. We came back together periodically as a whole group for a consultancy protocol in which members of the team could ask questions and critique each other's proposals. This resulted in multiple iterations of every proposal.

From those brainstorming sessions, we eventually settled on two different school models. The group felt confident that we did not need to fully commit to one model. We could present Dr. Baker and the executive team with our top two models along with their benefits and challenges. For the next two meetings, we broke into teams to flesh out each design, using Dr. Baker's questions as guidelines. Periodically, we would bring our best thinking back to the whole group, ask questions, poke holes, find weaknesses, and identify strengths of the different models, before returning to our sub-teams to refine our answers. The eventual document we presented to Dr. Baker went through multiple iterations and ended up being a set of considerations for each model that the committee endorsed unanimously and with enthusiasm (see Appendix C).

The first model called for a neighborhood school located in an area with a high concentration of Spanish-speaking families. The other model called for the building of a new school that could become a dual-language academy not subject to any attendance boundaries currently in the district. Both had their merits and costs. A neighborhood dual-language school could be opened sooner, and has the advantage of serving a specific population where there is already a high concentration of Spanish-speaking speaking students. The cost of this model is the potential to disrupt the existing school community and invite gentrification of the neighborhood by well-resourced English-speaking families seeking a dual-language school. Building a new school instead has the advantage of being able to draw students from across the district without threat of gentrification, but could decrease diversity across the district. It might also take years to allocate enough funds for the opening of the school.

The quality of our thinking and planning depended significantly on the makeup of this team, which could be roughly divided into two camps. The larger group consisted of practitioners and building leaders who came to this fully committed to dual language as a concept. They were united in their belief that some form of dual language education was imperative for our students. The other, smaller, subgroup was made up of executive team members who were very amenable to the program, but sufficiently skeptical of the ease with which we could create a viable set of solutions to the challenges of implementation in our context. I saw my role as continuing to surface the tensions, disagreements, and opposing views of these subgroups, which I did in two ways. First, I created working subgroups with members from both camps. Second, I led feedback sessions with the whole team that lifted up voices of dissent about proposals. I would remain in a

facilitative role, not joining in either group. Throughout, Dr. Baker reminded me to make sure certain voices were heard -- voices of those he was aware would raise concerns that would be present in the larger community.

At various times, the tension felt as if it might interfere with our productivity. At one point in the brainstorming, when teams were critiquing the various plans, one executive team member asked how we would respond to special interest groups who claimed their children had just as much right to a special school as second-language learners – say, for example, parents of gifted students, who could be demanding at times. Some who believe in dual language as a moral imperative were angered by this objection, almost as if the executive team member was himself endorsing it. However, the group never degenerated to the point of being unproductive or counter-productive. Instead, we took this opportunity to articulate our purpose within the priorities outlined in the Bellingham Promise. Because this is likely community objection, it was productive to deal with it in this setting. We were able to use the tension to stay with ideas that may have lacked clarity or failed to consider certain contingencies and work through them toward a better product. The last three meetings dedicated significant time to providing critical feedback and revising our document. In the end, the entire team was able to endorse our proposed considerations as representative of our best thinking about how to move forward *and* as evidence that a dual-language program was valuable enough and viable enough to recommend that we continue the conversation with a larger group in the district, and especially Dr. Baker.

In the end, we developed two fairly robust lines of thinking that both had their (separate) answers to Dr. Baker's concerns. We used the last two meetings of our time

together to refine this proposal document together. During this entire process, I served in a facilitation role. I did not join any of the subgroups, but instead facilitated questioning and investigations between the groups. This allowed me to maintain a systemic view of the ongoing work. During facilitation, however, I did participate. If an idea seemed to be going unstated, or if an objection was not being raised, I saw it as my job to make it explicit. The completion of this phase of the work was a presentation of our synthesis of the group's thinking to date to Dr. Baker (see Appendix C). We hoped to obtain his consent to continue the process with a formal district committee.

Upon sharing the proposed considerations with Dr. Baker, we discussed next steps. Dr. Baker found our document sufficient to warrant further conversation, but he was unwilling to move too quickly into a formalized process and signal a level of commitment to the program he was not yet willing to grant. Dr. Baker has a careful eye on communication, and managing a message at an intentional order and pace. Instead, we agreed that it would be valuable to look to other districts in Washington who had implemented dual-language programs successfully to attempt to find a "gold standard" for Bellingham.

**Visiting Dual-Language Schools in Washington[2]**

Washington state has 294 separate school districts, and only a small fraction have dual-language programs. Much of this is due to the economies of scale, and small population sizes. Districts that do have dual-language programs tend to be larger and near urban centers. In December, I visited two such districts, both in the greater Seattle area, to get a sense of the successes and challenges of opening and maintaining such a

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[2] Note: The names of the schools outside of Bellingham in this section have been altered to protect their anonymity.

program. I was especially eager to visit the district that had inspired the "partner-school" model we endorsed in our proposal. Both visits were informative, and they also uncovered challenges in implementation that were not immediately obvious from their websites and program marketing.

The first school I visited was Greenfield Middle School in an affluent suburb of Seattle. The principal was gracious enough to allow me to sit in during a meeting with parents of rising sixth graders. I learned that both the principal and the assistant principal of the middle school were new to the school this year, and the dual-language school was only one program within their school of approximately 500 students. The meeting I attended was one of several that Greenfield administrators held to hear from parents about their needs, concerns, and questions. The school leaders also shared with me another motivation: to convey concerns about student behavior in the dual language program. When I spoke to the principal, she told me her dual language program was comprised almost exclusively of students who were Spanish speaking. Many of them entered the school below grade level and there was a sense among the administration that many among the staff might have low expectations for these students. It was the school leadership's intent to change that.

Several issues about this school context struck me. First, Greenfield's principal shared with me that, when she was transferred to lead this school, she was told she was being brought in to improve culture. It was not until just before she entered the role that she was told the school had a dual-language program, implying a lack of institutional focus or concern. Moreover, she is not bilingual. Some might infer from these decisions that the district does not value dual language learning, whether or not that is true. My key

takeaway from Greenfield was that a successful program would require commitments at all levels of the system (from the site to the superintendent). In the case of this school, dual language is an afterthought, and it may exacerbate inequities rather than repair them.

Greenfield also showed me potential pitfalls that can come from the student selection process. In addition to the dual-language program, the district has a high-performing foreign-language immersion program in another middle school in a much more affluent part of the district. It focuses on a different language and was designed as an elite program for native English speakers to develop biliteracy. Given the contrasts in resources and student demographics, I wondered if this dual-language school might fall victim to implicit biases, resulting in a lack of instructional rigor. Of course, much more investigation and evidence would be necessary to uncover the true root causes of any problems the school is facing. For instance, the students entering sixth grade may be just about to accelerate their academic score growth since dual-language programs often see an initial lag in performance, followed by an acceleration after years five and six (Collier and Thomas, 2004). That could explain the initial underperformance. If that is true, however, the administration and teachers at the middle school could falsely conclude that dual-language instruction is ineffective when, in reality, the children are poised to start outperforming their native-English speaking peers. Either way, the school staff and administration should have been better prepared to support these students with high expectations and academically rigorous content and pedagogy.

The second school I visited was Mountain View Elementary, in a district with roughly the same size student population, but different demographics. Compared to Greenfield's district, roughly four times as many students identify as low income, and

there are twice as many students designated "English language learners." This district, just like Bellingham, recently received an award for its commitment to equity, and its dual-language program encompasses six elementary schools. Mountain View Elementary School was currently in its second year of dual-language implementation, with students in kindergarten and first grade spending half their day in an English classroom and half in a Spanish classroom. In this district, each new dual-language school opens with a partner school in proximity to accommodate students who opt not to participate in the dual-language program and students who move into the area unprepared for partial immersion in the target language.

I met with the school's dual-language coordinator and briefly with the principal, who described Mountain View Elementary's opening as more intentional than Greenfield had been in their program management. Still, the school had its challenges. The first challenge was declining enrollment of native Spanish speakers in the school. According to the coordinator, roughly 30-35% of the first graders were native Spanish speakers, but less than a quarter of the kindergartners were. Given that the ideal ratio for dual-language learning is fifty percent native speakers of the target language, school leaders were concerned. When I asked the coordinator what she would suggest to address this challenge, she shared that the district was considering widening their partner model to include a cluster of schools so that there would be a larger pool of students to draw from to create the ideal representation.

A second concern, shared by many dual-language programs, was recruiting and retaining high-quality bilingually certified teachers. The rarity of such teachers caused Mountain View, and the district overall, to opt for the 50-50 model of Spanish-English

rather than the 90-10 model. It is simply too difficult to find enough qualified teachers to fill these slots. Moreover, as the dual-language program rolls up to higher grades, the need for more bilingual teachers will increase each year. During the first two years, the school did not need to replace any teachers. Attrition accounted for some openings, but teachers who were bilingual shifted into the necessary grade levels while monolingual teachers moved up. For the future, the district has engaged with Western Washington University to create a novel certification program for bilingual paraeducators, open to anyone with an associate's degree or beyond. Students will split their workday between paraeducator and intern teacher roles, and take classes at night. After two years, they will be certified bilingual teachers ready for hire. Bellingham Public Schools is also a partner in this program, though graduates will not currently be able to move to Bellingham if they wish to work in a dual-language program.

 Another challenge, related to the one above, was the potential disconnect between the dual-language staff and the rest of the school staff. The school coordinator told me she felt as if there were two separate staffs. When asked what she would do differently, she shared that she would train the entire staff thoroughly on the nature of the dual-language program and involve all of them in the planning and implementation of the program. This echoed her most significant piece of advice about starting up a dual-language program, which was to involve all stakeholder groups in the process from the beginning and throughout the process.

 The two school visits, while in no way an exhaustive exploration of the landscape of dual-language schools, were instructive. A common theme that emerged was the necessity of involving all members of the greater school community -- district

administration, faculty and staff, both dual-language specialists and not, parents, and children -- in the implementation and ongoing management of the school. The benefits may seem obvious; the costs of not doing so are also significant. Schools need to set clear expectations for student engagement and outcomes that are responsive to the families' needs. The process can be challenging, especially in the beginning, and outcomes take time, so patience and vigilance are critical. Also, staffing such a program is a unique challenge, so a school or district must be intentional and proactive about "growing their own" pipeline of teachers from within. And finally, districts must carefully consider who will attend these schools. If the program is intended to be culturally and linguistically affirming for the students who are native speakers of the target language, while promoting bilingualism and biliteracy for all students in the school, then one of the most important considerations is how the student population will be chosen. This is not something to be decided only once, during design; it should be monitored and adjusted over the life of the program.

Upon return to Bellingham, I shared my findings with Dr. Baker. We agreed that neither program provided the gold standard that we were hoping for, so the search continued. I asked the Washington Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) dual-language division for recommendations, then set out to investigate the districts they suggested. Given the winter vacation, these visits were scheduled for January after the return to school.

**Next Steps**

As this next phase of the work was very tactical and required technical and contextual knowledge, I met with the ELL director in January, along with a school

principal of one of the schools with a significant Spanish-speaking population. Dr. Baker and I suspected that this principal would have valuable insights about how rebranding might impact a school. She offered several insights that would impact the eventual possible opening of the school, including most importantly thoughts about staff members who were already bilingual and supporting our native Spanish speakers. Additionally, she asked questions about implementation timelines and curriculum adoptions. Being in the school, she also expressed enthusiasm for the program and hoped we would be able to go beyond the discussion phase. At the conclusion of the discussion with her, we invited her to attend the next executive cabinet the following week to help the group think through practical questions.

Meanwhile, Dr. Baker and I scheduled a meeting with members of the dual-language design team and the executive cabinet to examine the models we had proposed to them (Appendix D) and begin to collect details about what implementation would require. This marked a significant step forward, since most of the design team and all members of the cabinet attended. While there was no final decision, we held an optimistic and creative conversation. People were willing to challenge each other's thinking and ideas and ask questions. Prior to this meeting, I had thought of success as the permission to continue the conversation about opening an eventual school. The meeting concluded with permission to do that, and to think more broadly about opening multiple locations in the future.

**Chapter 4: Evidence of Progress**

The goal of this project was to convince the authorizing body in the district, namely the superintendent and the executive team, to endorse the dual-language approach to schooling. The work of planning, designing, staffing, and eventually opening a dual-language school is ahead in the future, and it is still an open question if the district will choose to go officially down that path. Therefore, I examine the progress from two different vantage points. First, I use my theory of action to examine the evidence for forward progress of the project. Second, I will look at evidence that this project will continue to move forward.

**Table 1**

*Project Theory of Action and A Summary of Results to Date*

| IF I... | RESULTS |
|---|---|
| Gather a team of educators from multiple levels of Bellingham Public Schools (BPS), from the classroom to the executive team | <ul><li>I invited people from two groups to work on this challenge:<ul><li>Educators who attended *La Cosecha* dual-language conference in New Mexico last year</li><li>Members of the executive cabinet</li></ul></li><li>The team included<ul><li>Deputy superintendent</li><li>Assistant superintendent</li><li>Two executive directors of teaching and learning from early childhood and secondary areas</li><li>Director of community engagement (a native Spanish speaker and advocate for this community)</li><li>Director of English Language Learning programs</li><li>Middle-school principal</li><li>Elementary-school principal</li><li>High-school assistant principal (and former ELL director)</li><li>Two ELL classroom teachers</li></ul></li></ul> |
| Facilitate discussions which surface productive conflict on the various dual-language models | <ul><li>I made time during meeting #2 for the ELL director and the lead ELL teacher to share models of dual-language implementation from other districts, along with models supported by the research literature.</li></ul> |

| | |
|---|---|
| | <ul><li>Using Dr. Baker's issues, concerns, and questions that framed our work, we looked critically at each of the models presented.</li><li>Team chose two models they felt would best address Dr. Baker's the concerns:<ul><li>A dual-language magnet school to open in a not-yet existing school (King Mountain).</li><li>A neighborhood partner model based on the approach used by a district in the Seattle area.</li></ul></li></ul> |
| While giving the ownership of the change to those closest to the work, and | <ul><li>The Bilingual Action Team included teachers, principals, program directors, and members of the executive cabinet.</li><li>This ensured that decisions involving any costs were shared by different levels of the system.</li></ul> |
| Help the team surface problems with each model and decide upon the best model(s) to explore given Bellingham's context | <ul><li>In meetings #2 and #3, I broke the larger group into separate teams to explore each model and critically imagine it in some detail.</li><li>After time for planning and ideation, each sub-team presented their ideas. Using questioning protocols, we exposed concerns or weaknesses for the team to refine.</li></ul> |
| Garner the support of all the members of the committee, particularly the members of the executive team | <ul><li>The team unanimously agreed that both of models we explored were worthy of future consideration.</li><li>In the last two meetings, the team critically examined the proposal draft and raised concerns or questions.</li><li>Throughout the project, each decision went through our "consent protocol" that required all members to express support for a change before it was made.</li></ul> |
| Submit for consideration to Dr. Baker a set of recommendations that addresses questions of access, plans for resource allocation and forecasts a plan to scale the implementation of dual language to more students in the district | <ul><li>After our final meeting, we completed our *Dual Language Concept Memo* (see Appendix C).</li><li>In a meeting, Dr. Baker told me that he was not fully convinced, but our work had merit and warranted further discussion with the larger executive team. His ongoing concern was that it was inequitable to offer something this valuable to only a small number of our students. We did not yet have an answer to that question.</li><li>Two next steps were decided<ul><li>I would visit or contact districts to find "gold standard" models.</li><li>We scheduled a meeting with the executive cabinet and representatives from the dual-language work group (January 28th) to further examine the proposals from a tactical level.</li></ul></li></ul> |
| THEN… | <ul><li>In a personal communication with the Director of ELL</li></ul> |

| | |
|---|---|
| The costs inherent in making these recommended choices will be owned by more actors across the system, and | programming in the district, we discussed our evolution of thought over the course of the work. She shared with me that she now saw the value of making our proposal more politically viable by being able to frame the problem and solution from different vantage points. <br>● I did not gather more information from members of the committee regarding their perspective changes. In future, I would be curious to know if they recognized the value of collectively owning the costs inherent in any set of recommendations. |
| Dr. Baker will be convinced that further discussions regarding the viability and value of such a program should continue in Bellingham | ● At the January 28 meeting, dual-language schooling was the sole strategic item on the agenda. Members of the design team joined the cabinet to map out a specific plan for moving towards implementation. <br>● The ELL director asked "What would need to happen to convene a formal design committee?" The answer was that we were not there yet, but had identified some steps to get there, as discussed above. <br>● In a February meeting with the executive cabinet, Dr. Baker shared his experience visiting a school in a nearby district after I connected him with the dual-language director there. According to him, not many students move in or out of the dual-language schools there and instead remain in their neighborhood schools. Dr. Baker had a similar concern for Bellingham, but his visit led to an epiphany. If we think of dual-language programming within a larger set of goals related to fostering multilingual skills, dual language could be viewed as an equitable means of moving toward that goal, not something that must be provided to all students. This new framing helped us all to think about the problem in more flexible ways. <br>● In a subsequent 1:1 meeting with him, we discussed the possibility to use this frame to explain to the community why dual language exists some places and not others. <br>● At the February 26 elementary principals meeting, Dr. Baker formally announced our intention to pursue the possibility of a dual-language elementary school, naming specific candidate schools and models. Discussion followed. This marked a significant move forward for the work of eventually opening such a school in Bellingham. I consider this a successful conclusion to my phase of the work. |

**Changes and Evidence of Impact in Bellingham Public Schools**

Much intentional work had been done before my residency to support multilingual learners in Bellingham. Prior to Dr. Baker's arrival ten years ago, support for these students was limited. According to the current ELL director, there were only three ELL support teachers for the entire district, and no central-office director dedicated to supporting these teachers and students. Under the leadership and direction of Dr. Baker and two ELL directors, a more robust support system was developed. In that same time, leaders from the classroom to the director level began to see dual-language programs as the next step, particularly for Spanish speakers (our largest second-language subgroup). Recently, advocates within the district began to lobby Dr. Baker for this change. He sent a team to *La Cosecha*, the national conference on dual language in New Mexico. At the beginning of this year, there was support from different levels of the district, but no plan. My task was to present a plan that was research-based, viable, and aligned with the district's strategic mission.

Over October and November, I convened the team to begin drafting a plan to present to Dr. Baker and the executive team. We met for seven work sessions and successfully drafted a memo with our suggestions. The memo was successful in opening the door to future discussions about the implementation of dual language. As of this writing, the district is planning to move beyond its "Phase Zero" investigation into the viability of opening a dual-language school.

In the executive cabinet meeting on January 28, 2020, the dual-language team joined the cabinet to get more concrete and tactical about moving forward with the plan. In the meeting, Dr. Baker stated that, if we set a goal for all students in the district to

become bilingual in Spanish and English, then this approach could be part of that larger goal, opening the door for differentiated but equitable program adoption. Perhaps some schools could be dual-language while other schools had a more traditional elementary school approach to foreign language. This might meet Dr. Baker's concerns about equitable participation in languages across the district. At the end of the meeting, Dr. Baker directed us to explore the rollout for two schools and two partner schools. That work is beginning. Finally, after the meeting, he asked me to help schedule a visit to a dual-language school in a nearby district with a promising model, which took place on February 5, 2020.

As of this writing, the possibility of opening a dual-language school continues to gain momentum and support. Prior to my arrival, educators throughout Bellingham had lobbied for a dual-language school for years. In the 2018-2019 school year, a team attended a national conference to learn more, but plans did not move past the discussion level. However, I had dedicated time to facilitate the process, and I was able to bring together the team to move the work past discussion into the more tactical phase. The next stage will be to shepherd the work forward into the establishment of a formal committee or task force in the district to formally lead the design and adoption of the plan. On February 26, the district elementary principals held their monthly meeting at the district office, where Dr. Baker formally shared the district's intention to continue actively discussing the possibility of a dual-language elementary school, and he specifically named some candidate schools and models. Discussion followed. This marked a significant move forward for the work of eventually opening such a school in Bellingham. I consider this a successful conclusion to my phase of the work.

**Chapter 5: Analyzing the Process and Outcomes**

In this chapter, I first analyze our progress using Mark Moore's (1995) strategic triangle framework. I assess the health of the organizational culture in Bellingham, and how that has shaped change work in this district. I also analyze my own approach and the tensions I experienced as a leader in relation to the culture of change as it exists and is practiced in Bellingham Public Schools. A significant portion of this analysis focuses on my role navigating between the committee I facilitated and the official leadership of the district. Second, I use research on leading change (e.g. Heifetz & Linsky, 2017) to investigate why groups resist change, how that was observed in Bellingham, and my successes and setbacks in engaging with this particular challenge. I have two objectives for this chapter. The first is to better understand my own leadership skills, styles, and preferences to best inform my practices in future district leadership positions. The second objective is to offer recommendations to those who wish to lead similar projects.

The purpose of the strategic project I led was to convince the district to open a dual-language school in the Bellingham Public School district. Initially, the plan was to enact a "phase one" approach to the work and plan a rough overview of the most viable option for opening such a school. However, I quickly recognized that this would be challenging. Opening a new school or program would take much longer than the six months I had for my project. The district was comprised almost entirely of neighborhood schools, and while there were some programs that were not present in every school (e.g. International Baccalaureate), every school in the district was free to engage with them if they chose. But the very nature of a dual-language school was exclusive to a single

school or a small number of schools. This would be unusual in Bellingham. The district has very few examples of highly specialized programs such as a dual-language school.

At the onset of the project, my intention was to get approval to open a dual-language program. But Dr. Baker's goal was to explore the possibility of such a program. He would be deliberate and careful about such a substantive change and stated that deciding against it might also be a form of success, if we reached the conclusion that such a program was not viable. This initial distinction – between my impatience and Dr. Baker's care and deliberation – would be present throughout the entire process. It is this tension that helped me redefine success for this project. I expanded the project to start with an investigation into the viability of such a school, a "phase zero" step in the process. Along with this shift, I redefined success away from attempting to fully plan for a dual-language school and instead toward convincing the authorizing body, the superintendent and executive committee, to convene a formal committee to continue the planning.

In the beginning of the project, I made some assumptions about where we would begin and how that would shape the work as we moved it forward. On more than one occasion, I heard Dr. Baker say that, while many people had told him that we need to do "it," there was never much clarity about what "it" really was. In other words, people had advocated for dual language, but had not brought him a plan.

This explanation differed from the one I heard from the advocates of dual language, those who had been proposing such a school to Dr. Baker for years. They explained that they had proposed a dual-language school in multiple ways but had only been stonewalled up to this point. This moment, they told me, felt different because we

now had an explicit invitation to explore the idea more fully and bring forward a plan that seemed to have the possibility of being enacted. I found myself maneuvering between two potentially competing narratives. The challenge for me was to keep the work moving forward when there was also a tendency for some to retell old narratives that were ultimately designed to justify a particular position and stance. In doing so, I also needed to honor the work and effort done before as these people were the ones who believed in the work and would carry it forward.

**Framework #1: Mark Moore's Strategic Triangle of Public Value**

From the early days of the project, I felt a persistent tension between the scope of the work required to implement a dual-language school and what was plausible in the five or six months of work I had for the project. Planning and designing such a program should take at least a year and a half, beginning with a significant amount of time devoted to community engagement, discussions, and problem solving, followed by a full year to plan the school. This is particularly true in a place like Bellingham where leaders pride themselves on being deliberate about change, allowing for a deep, thoughtful, and thorough approach. In the first days of the work, I defined success as opening a school, or at least being granted the official endorsement to begin the year of planning. This was an unrealistic aspiration, given the number of variables that would be out of my control or influence beyond my time in the district. Instead, I began to think of success as thoroughly examining dual language programs that could succeed in this context and analyzing our district's capacity for this work. This work would be shaped by Mark Moore's strategic planning for the creation of public value.

Moore (1997) recommends that public managers think about their work from three angles. The first is the creation of public value. What is the value added to the community? How will this be quantified? How will it be communicated? The delicate work, according to Moore, is for public managers to allocate resources in new, innovative ways while recognizing that they are beholden, as *public* managers, to the community. Public value is not defined solely by financial gains. How does the work we are engaging with add to civic participation, increased liberty, and equity?

To create public value, we also must assess our organization using Moore's second lens: the capacity to do the work. Can this new program be handled within the system as it currently operates? What likely increases to our capacity will we need to create? Are the changes that may need to happen within our system mostly technical changes, or would we need to attend to the adaptive work of politics, public sentiment, and belief systems of those who influence the school district from within and from without (Kavanaugh, 2014).

Finally, Moore recognizes that change within a political system requires leaders to understand and embrace their organization's *authorizing environment*. It is tempting to consider the public managers, in this case ultimately the superintendent, as the primary authorizing environment for implementing such a program as we were imagining. Indeed, most school districts also have an elected school board with authorizing power over programs and resource allocation. Bellingham Public Schools is unique in that it operates under a "policy governance" model, which grants more managerial authority to the

superintendent, while holding him accountable for certain outcomes. Thus, Dr. Baker really is the central authorizer in this context.

In the initial phase of my work on this project, I convened a group of advocates of dual language from all levels of the district. Because this group already favored dual-language schooling, I made some assumptions about the work we would need to undertake and where we should start. Using Moore's strategic triangle as a guiding framework for my leadership, I assumed that the group held consensus on the "public value" that was to be created by implementing dual language. Indeed, the research they shared with me convinced me of the public value we would be creating. Also, given the framing questions Dr. Baker provided to guide our work, I assumed we should start by focusing on the



Fig. X Strategic Triangle for public managers in creating public value. Source: Mark Moore, "Creating Public Value.

organizational capacity of Bellingham Public Schools to implement such a program. What's more, I led the group initially in a series of *technical* discussions about this organizational capacity. I now believe these assumptions were naive, or at least insufficient. I did not initially give enough attention to the more significant adaptive challenges to our organization's capacity.

This focus did not result in failure, however. I still believe the appropriate place to start was with technical problems. My error was in thinking that solving technical organizational questions was the bulk of the work we needed to do. Over the course of
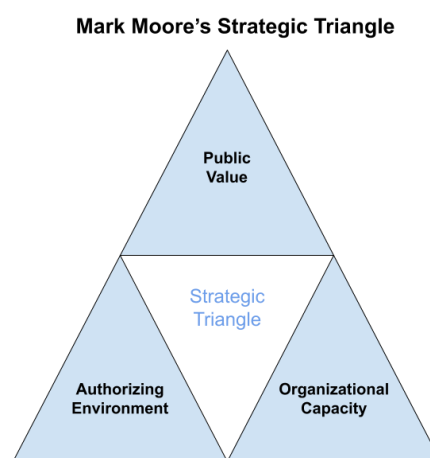
the first few meetings, I came to realize that we needed to devote more time to deeper questions than technical capacity. Some of these learnings will be further discussed in the next section focusing on my second framework, i.e. group dynamics and change leadership. Staying within Moore's framework, I adjusted some of our meetings to focus more on the authorizing environment and its relationship to the community's perception of public value.

Much of our work remained focused on answering the technical questions of capacity presented to us by Dr. Baker. In an attempt to attend to/address Moore's other areas, I created structures that allowed for different voices to be elevated in the discussion. As I described above, a majority of team members were thoroughly convinced of the universal value of dual-language programs. However, three members from the executive cabinet took a broader systems-level perspective. While they also vocally supported the initiative, they asked questions about implications for other systems and different constituent groups within the district. On more than one occasion, Dr. Baker pushed me to make sure these voices were elevated in the meetings because they would anticipate challenges to our work, particularly in terms of the greater public authorizing environment. I strategically divided these members across subgroups and encouraged them to ask difficult questions about potential public opposition to a dual-language program.

Two examples of this pushed the thinking of the group. First, as previously mentioned, one of the executive team members asked about how parents of "gifted" students would respond. Historically, many parents of gifted students had expressed concerns that, on the surface, resemble those for our minority language populations. They

felt their child's needs were not being met. Why not open a special school for them? Initially, our dual-language group rejected this reasoning as a false conflation, but it surfaced a larger challenge: How do we decide how to prioritize our resources in support of specific student populations?

A second example arose from another question during our design work. An executive team member asked about teachers presently working in the schools most likely to become dual-language schools. Were we ready to tell these teachers they would all have to move to other schools when their schools adopted this new model? This forced the group to address the adaptive impact on the adult groups in the system and underscored the need for multiple stakeholder groups in the decision-making process.

As a response to the concerns raised by these executive team members, I began to embed questions into our processes that would surface insights into these broader areas. When we answered a question or solved a dilemma, we considered how our suggestion would be received by parent and teacher groups who would be impacted by this, thereby keeping the greater authorizing environment at the fore of our thinking. As a result, our final product was more thorough and considerate of the broad issues of program implementation (see Appendix C). If I had continued to operate from my initial assumptions -- that this was fundamentally a technical question about organizational capacity -- our proposals would have been narrower. We would have set ourselves up for disappointment by not considering the long and serious work ahead of us to address these broad, complex concerns.

This shift mirrors the evolution of my thoughts about the scope of my work. Initially, I aimed to answer Dr. Baker's technical questions so completely that the district

would have to move forward with formal program design and implementation. Instead, the goal became to create a set of proposals that encouraged further discussion while, at the same time, acknowledging the serious work that would be necessary to gain support from the greater community.

Between the final meetings of the design committee and the next phase -- discussing the program with the greater executive team -- Dr. Baker and I had several discussions about next steps. Largely, his questions have continued to appear technical in nature. He urged me to find examples of schools similar to ours with successful dual language programs, and in planning discussions with the executive cabinet, he raised detailed, technical questions about how such a program might be rolled out.

As discussed above, Dr. Baker and I arranged for him to visit a school district in the Seattle area with several dual-language schools in operation. He spent half a day there visiting a school and meeting with the director of dual-language programming. He returned with new understandings that he shared with me and the executive team.

Two of Dr. Baker's main concerns from the beginning were the difficulty of scaling this approach to meet the needs of all students, and the impact on neighborhood schools. But during his visit to the model district, he learned that disruption to their neighborhood schools was minimal. Also, he concluded that the dual-language model could be one of several different programmatic options to meet our collective goals of graduating multilingual students and fostering equity, and therefore not necessary to scale to *all* students. Instead, it could be a powerful niche program that fit into the larger goals of the district. He shared this new vision with the executive team and, shortly afterwards, announced to the elementary school principals that we would more formally continue to

explore dual-language programming. From the principals' nods, smiles, and words of approval, I concluded that the new direction was well received.

**Framework #2: Group dynamics and change leadership**

Leading people in dynamic systems of competing attentions, priorities, and values is complex work that demands an understanding of the peculiar characteristics of group work. My analysis of the work I led, and the team completed is rooted in the theories of adaptive leadership as described by Ron Heifetz and Marty Linsky in *Leadership on the Line*.

As I outlined in the above section, I began the project with a common yet highly problematic leadership error: attempting to solve adaptive problems with technical solutions. Initially, I assumed the central work was to solve the technical challenges of opening a dual-language school and paid little attention to the adaptive challenges that we would face in doing this work. In their research on the challenges of working in groups, Kenwyn Smith and David Berg (1997) clarify that the central "paradox" of groups is that groups come together specifically for the purpose of solving a problem -- a problem that can only be solved by that group -- and then, because of competing notions of survival, identity, and group cohesion, that very group can become mired in inaction. The successful leader of change, according to Heifetz and Linsky (2017), can create the proper "holding environment" to adjust the heat, or what Smith and Berg may call *conflict*. Conflict is neither good nor bad in itself. It is the dosage and deployment of conflict that matters, and, if properly facilitated, conflict is a necessary ingredient in adaptive solutions.

My role in leading this work was to create the holding environment and monitor the heat to create the ideal amount of conflict that would allow for productive struggle with the work. In early meetings with the team, I found myself trying to discount conflict and convince the members of the group that we were remarkably close to consensus. This had some positive effects, in that it contributed to the sense of unity and psychological safety people needed to engage with this work. However, we were in danger of becoming complacent and unproductive. The truth was that there was tremendous disagreement in our group. Team members supported different timelines or different models, or valued constituent groups differently. We needed to leverage this disagreement, rather than deny it, to engage in the productive struggle necessary to create adaptive solutions.

A significant challenge for me as a facilitator and leader was that I found myself identifying closely with a subset of the thinkers in the room. After one of the early meetings, I told Dr. Baker that I was already convinced that this work needed to move forward and was frankly surprised that it had not done so. He responded with several considerations that I had ignored, all with serious political consequences which could jeopardize our long-term success. Without plans for access and resource allocation, both issues likely to ignite objection within the community, the project was not ready to move forward. In future meetings, he suggested I invite particular voices into the discussion. He explicitly said, "Make sure these people are heard in the discussion. They will bring up points the group needs to hear." He was right, and when I began to create discussion structures that surfaced conflict, they led to better solutions that accounted for multiple stakeholder groups, such as impacted teachers and parents in other special-interest populations.

What Dr. Baker was helping me to do was two-fold. First, he was helping me learn to give the work back to the people most equipped to do it. If the real work was, as I had originally predicted, simply devising technical solutions to Dr. Baker's list of concerns, I could have done it myself in less time, by simply finding the school models that best address the concerns of our context, and then drafting a proposal for Dr. Baker with my recommendations. As Heifetz and Linsky point out, I would then have to own the impact of these decisions, including any reallocation of resources. These decisions would not be owned by those closest to the work, but they would experience the consequences. "Even if the resolution differed from the one [I] would have fashioned...the outcome was better when [I] let the people involved determine their own resolution" (Heifetz & Linsky, 2017, p. 128).

The second lesson I learned from Dr. Baker's leadership was how to look at the problem from a systems-level perspective. What Heifetz and Linsky call getting "on the balcony" as opposed to the "dance floor" is a vital skill for leaders who wish to maintain the best possible chance at clarity (p. 51-52). I was accustomed to assessing the arguments provided by those who know the work best, adopting the most persuasive view, and advocating from that perspective. The approach has yielded advantages in the past; it creates trust. In other words, it allows me to gain the confidence of those doing the work and a sense of allyship. However, the limitations to this approach are significant. First, and most obvious, is the possibility that the perspective of those on the "dance floor" is wrong or, at least, limited. If I did not reach an altitude that would allow me to see the implications of our recommendations for the greater system, I would likely endorse proposals that produced unintended, undesirable effects on the greater system.

Ultimately, this would jeopardize the durability and sustainability of the program we were trying to create.

I initially entered this process with an academic understanding of the two frameworks I intended to use to guide the work, but I did not have an experiential familiarity with either of them. They made sense, and so I trusted myself to be able to adhere to them. It ended up being much more challenging than I had anticipated. Multiple times, I found myself pulled toward technical solutions, and even frustrated with people who might pose an obstacle to what I considered an "obvious" solution to a technical problem. The framework served as a reminder to continually step back and observe the larger landscape, which is ultimately what made the work possible for me. In this process, I became more familiar with my own habitual impatience, but I also found that leadership skills can be learned, practiced, and improved. In the following sections, I will assess the implications for this project on Bellingham schools, on the larger education sector, and importantly, on my own leadership development.

**Chapter 6: Implications**

My strategic project focused on moving the district toward opening a dual-language program to best serve its native Spanish-speaking students. My project focused on the initial phases of the work, exploration of the capacity of the district and organizing future work to improve the chances of successfully implementing such a program. The work on this project has impact and implications beyond dual language and beyond Bellingham. In this chapter, I first explore the implications of my work for Bellingham Public Schools, and then turn to implications for the greater education sector, and for myself and my future leadership in public education.

**Implications for Bellingham Public Schools**

In a late-January school board meeting, district leaders and community members took a journey that exemplifies some of the best qualities of the Bellingham school district. The meeting began with a listening campaign in which high school students shared how the *Bellingham Promise* impacts their student experiences. They spoke about how they see themselves in the *Promise* and where it falls short, and they raised questions about whether students are currently being served well in the schools, despite the ambitious intent of the *Promise*. Students were honest, sharing both gratitude and critical feedback. School board members and district leaders listened deeply, took notes, and reflected at the end about what they could do to better serve this community.

Once this portion of the evening was completed, the formal school board meeting began. The district had recently experienced profound tragedy in the loss of a beloved school leader. The team took time to honor this loss and even grieve together before turning to some of the formal business of running the school district. One presentation to

the board shared data from the most recent testing results. Much of the data was promising, but the district chose also to highlight an area where they were not satisfied with their progress. The presentation was reflective and honest, and it particularly focused on what *leadership* needed to do differently. They took full responsibility for the setback and the challenge to improve. In Bellingham Public Schools, success is shared widely, and failures are owned personally, particularly by leadership. Every meeting includes a substantial discussion of where we can improve. The evening concluded with a celebratory performance by a talented choir of students, who sang to the school board in appreciation for their leadership and service. The night, taken as a whole, exemplified the strength of Bellingham Public Schools. They celebrate the whole child, they engage the community, they own their need to improve, and they seek broad input from their stakeholder groups on how to go about that improvement.

This spirit is captured in *The Bellingham Promise*, as has been noted many times in this paper. As much as this document is the guiding star for all district practices, it is also an aspirational document. Instead of focusing narrowly on state testing data, the *Promise* specifically outlines seventeen outcomes. This broad focus could be seen as a handicap, discouraging focus, but that is not how I see it. It is an honest recognition of the complex human experience and an acknowledgment that we are in the business of developing human beings in community. It is fair, however, to note that the breadth of the outcomes can make it difficult to gain coherence around action at times. For instance, one of the outcomes in the *Promise* is that students will graduate as "multilingual readers and speakers" (The Bellingham Promise). This goal is not currently being met but keeping it in the *Promise* continues to draw attention to that challenge. Also, the *Promise* is often

referred to as a "living document," and I witnessed it change firsthand in my time here this year. Adopting explicit language on "Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion" has shaped much of the district's professional learning this year in a way that may not have been as intentional otherwise. It is the confluence of these two areas -- the desire to produce multilingual students along with a deep commitment to equity -- that has driven my strategic project this year.

As my phase of this work ends, I recommend three steps for the district to increase the chances of a successful opening of its first dual-language school, build capacity for its equity and inclusion initiative, and progress toward graduating more multilingual students.

1) *Establish a dual-language task force in the district.*

To this point, all the work towards opening a dual-language program in the district has been done by an ad-hoc committee consisting mostly of district leaders. As this phase was entirely exploratory and the district did not want to give the impression it was committed to a dual-language program, this made sense. However, as the work becomes more tangible and raises implications for actual schools and communities, a larger and more formal process should be undertaken to begin the planning for an eventual dual-language school (or schools).

Being intentional on membership of this task force would be critical. The district has an established process for doing this, but I will also offer my suggestions for who should be included in the formation of this group. The group should ideally be led by an executive with early childhood education expertise, as dual-language schools begin with the earliest grades, along with the Director of Teaching and Learning who oversees

English-language-learner programs. The task force should bring together a broad spectrum of team members who could contribute meaningful diverse perspectives to the discussion, including the executive director of community engagement; parents (English- and Spanish-speaking, and perhaps families with other first languages); students; teachers, from both the likely target schools and from others; ELL specialists; representatives from HR and the teachers' union; and a professor from Western Washington University who specializes in dual-language program implementation.

The purpose of this Task Force is two-fold. First, it should engage stakeholder groups from the larger community in the process. This may involve these members seeking input from groups they represent. Ownership of an adaptive change like this must be broadly held. The second purpose of the task force would be to create a set of recommendations to the superintendent for the design and implementation of the program both in the short- and long-term. The proposal should include suggestions for "key progress indicators" and a professional development plan (see below). For the first program to open in the fall of 2021, this task force will likely need to finish its work before winter break of 2020. This will allow time in the spring to plan and staff for the first kindergarten classes to enroll later that year.

2) *Create a set of key progress indicators to monitor the success of the program.*

To gauge the success of a dual-language program, I would recommend the district establish key progress indicators (KPI) in at least two areas, aligned with the original problem statement guiding this project (above). The KPIs should include academic outcomes, particularly in the area of language acquisition; for example, the rate of Spanish-speaking students exiting ELL status, the number of English-speaking students

who demonstrate proficiency in Spanish, reading scores (both growth and proficiency) for all students in the dual-language programs, and other academic test scores. Research suggests that a well-implemented dual-language program improves all these areas, but consistent monitoring of progress is essential (DeMatthews & Izquierdo, 2016).

The KPI should also measure the validation Latinx students experience in the school district. Baseline data from our healthy-youth surveys (see Appendix E), which currently show a gap in feelings of validation between white and Latinx students, will give us a starting point from which to monitor improvement. In our problem statement, we acknowledge that the current system of support for ELL students does not, by design, affirm their cultural and linguistic identity. This may explain why Latinx students report lower positive feelings in the surveys. Monitoring these results over time would give the district a measurement of progress toward addressing this part of the identified problem.

3) *Design a professional development plan.*

Implementing a program as different as this one creates an obvious need for professional development for the teachers who will deliver the new dual-language curriculum. Professional development should also extend to several targeted groups beyond the classroom. After teachers delivering dual-language instruction receive training, all the other teachers in the school need to take part (Li et al., 2016). This will help create a unified intention to support the students in this program. Teachers who are in the dual-language school but not participating in the program should be intimately aware of the vision and purpose of the program as they will also be supporting their peers, not to mention older siblings and parents. One of the warnings we heard throughout our research into other programs was the danger of creating disunity within a

school, which might lead to competition for scarce resources rather than a unified vision for what is best for these students. It may also be useful to create resources for teachers in the system who wish to teach in a bilingual setting but do not yet have the expertise or credentials. In the long term, this could help address eventual inevitable staffing concerns.

The next group who should receive targeted professional development is the leadership within the district. Leaders currently participate in book studies on topics directly related to equity and dismantling oppressive systems and practices. For at least the first two years, book studies should emphasize linguistic identity as it is affirmed in dual-language schooling. It is likely that principals and other district leaders will receive questions from their own communities about this new program, and they will need to be able to speak to its value and its alignment with the *Bellingham Promise*.

Finally, some district-wide professional development time should be dedicated to supporting educators at all levels in understanding the dual-language approach and its value in addressing issues of equity. A program as bold as dual language needs system-level support. Moreover, dual language will always face challenges of institutional capacity. Developing the capacity of educators within the system will increase the likelihood of long-term success of the program.

Bellingham Public Schools has, as its greatest strength, a strong and ambitious vision for itself and a willingness to look critically at its shortcomings when striving to reach this vision. By engaging the entire community, identifying key progress indicators, and developing a robust, long-term and broad professional development plan, they will increase the durability, sustainability, and success of their dual-language program. This

will result in continuing to move closer to reaching two key elements of the *Promise*: multilingualism and equity.

**Implications for the Education Sector**

Much is made of preparing students with a twenty-first century education. Usually, this involves STEM subjects, or perhaps in-demand workplace skills such as collaboration and problem solving. Others endorse helping students "learn how to learn" as an acknowledgment that the world is changing at a pace that demands adaptability. Less common in American public education is a system-level acknowledgment of the increasingly international nature of our economy and the need for multilingual skills in the twenty-first century. Those who do recognize the value of being multilingual and multiliterate acknowledge that acquiring such a skill grants access and opportunity. When this is the case, the coveted skill of knowing a language beyond the first language is often reserved for students of privilege.

Immigrants to the United States are well positioned to acquire this in-demand skill. However, they are often subject to a deficit-lens model of instruction that explicitly values English over their native language and seeks only to eliminate the deficit in those students, namely that they do not speak English. In a recent post on the National Council of Teachers of English website, members of that organization's Committee Against Racism and Bias, Keisha Rembert, Patrick Harris, and Felicia Hamilton (2019) write, "Anti-racist educators actively confront and challenge racism. Our classrooms must become the proving ground of discourse on race in America" (p. 1) The call is clear for educators and education systems who are serious about addressing racial injustice in the

United States which, in recent years has become more pronounced. It is not enough to teach about racism in our schools. We must actively create systems to overturn the injustices that we are, perhaps unintentionally, perpetuating.

Dual-language instruction is designed for students to advance in their first language while also learning English as a second language. It explicitly affirms the value of the non-native English speaker as a contributor to the learning environment because, in a dual-language school, they are the language models for all their peers. The benefits to this kind of instruction are numerous and go beyond the equitable affirmation of otherwise minoritized linguistic populations of students. It is also the best-known approach for helping students to become fluent English speakers. And native English speakers end up bilingual as well.

Fully implementing such a program is threatening to many as it is an explicit challenge to the dominant paradigm. To be successful, multilingualism and multiliteracy as skills must be elevated above English proficiency as an educational priority. This core belief upends the nativist commitment to "English-first" educational practices, even though it comes at no cost to the students in their English proficiency. To those who hold a mindset of protectionism, or anti-immigrant notions, this belief could sound like a threat that the student who only speaks English now has a deficit. If non-English speaking immigrants were prized as students with significant value to add to the educational environment, it would lead to a shift in access and power and resources that threatens the status quo.

When English proficiency is considered a necessary skill, and multilingualism good, but unnecessary, the imbalances in access, opportunity, and power are maintained

and even exacerbated. In a school system operating under this frame, non-English speaking students must check their linguistic identity at the door and focus on filling their deficit by learning English. Students who already speak English, then, are often free to explore a second language. In nominally progressive school systems such as these, parents who recognize the value of knowing a second language and whose children speak English can access this global, twenty-first century skill while their English-learner peers are relegated to intervention classes that teach them English. If multilingualism is truly a skill that grants access to opportunity, then in these kinds of systems, access is being heaped upon the already privileged and literally erased for those students who came in with the best chance at becoming multilingual. Is this intentional? Do progressively minded parents who want their children to speak a second language know that by participating in a "foreign-language immersion" model within a system that still prizes English proficiency as the highest value, they are perpetuating and accelerating inequity? It is hard to know.

The discussion around dual-language programming, then, is a facet of the larger discussion about designing school systems to undo inequity by prioritizing the needs of the minoritized student populations. Once a school district commits to equity, to truly eliminating the opportunity gap, then resource distribution priorities must change.

This is obviously deeply adaptive work. There is no simple technical fix for inequity. Therefore, systems must engage people from across the system in solving this problem, but first must recognize that there is a problem to solve. I believe they will have the best chance of success if leaders help the community unite around a common vision of equity, then begin the slow and challenging work of uncovering and eliminating

inequities in their system. Dual-language programs that are explicitly designed to affirm children's linguistic and cultural identities have the power to reverse these inequities for many of our students.

Families with existing privilege in the district should be reassured to find that elite student populations actually pay no price for this. All students learn English better under this system, when implemented well, and native English-speakers learn a second language also. English-speaking families of students in dual-language programs often report that one of the greatest benefits -- to their whole family, not just their emerging bilingual students -- is a richer, more diverse community. They experience new cultures and feel connected to families who might have otherwise been isolated from them. In short, prejudices are reduced and the values of a more pluralistic society are experienced by all.

One of the foundations of cultural identity is language. While multilingualism has not been prized by the American education system as a whole prior to now, it has been a feature of most other school systems around the world. It is time for American education to join the rest of the world and embrace this timeless (and also thoroughly modern) skill of multilingualism and doing so would require nothing more than reframing our collective mindset away from opportunity hoarding.

Perhaps one more broad implication for the sector concerns the care we should take when implementing programs. As a practitioner, one of the most widespread problems I have experienced in the education sector is the poor implementation of new programming. Not enough stakeholders are consulted, the purpose is often unclear, and technical details are left unattended. When implemented poorly, or hastily, or without

adequate rationale and buy-in, an otherwise effective intervention can be rendered inert.

Bellingham has been an excellent teacher for me in this regard. Care is taken. Decisions

are delayed until voices are heard. The challenges are not glossed over, but instead

attended to. Perhaps most importantly, a clear purpose for an intervention – a purpose

that is tied to our commonly-held values – is always clearly communicated. This has not

been my typical experience during my twenty-three years in education.

**Implications for Self**

I entered my position as a resident in Bellingham Public Schools with twenty-

three years' experience as an educator in public school systems, and two years as a

graduate student at a prestigious university. Although I was aware of my own hubris, and

attempted regularly to counter that by practicing humility, I entered believing I had a

solid set of skills as a thinker and leader in the education system. At times, I fear that my

confidence borders on arrogance, and this is something I have wrestled with throughout

my time working in the district.

Whether it is because of the forces of fate, or simply good fortune, Bellingham

Public Schools has been the perfect place for me to learn to manage this particular

internal challenge regarding my own leadership. Prior to my time in the Ed.L.D. program,

I was a middle school principal in a high-performing school and district. Despite our high

ratings, I saw many opportunities to improve our practice. However, I had enough sense

to know that I could not simply mandate changes. I formed a leadership committee. I

attempted to involve people at different levels of the organization. Truthfully, though, I

also know that this was somewhat disingenuous. Instead of honestly engaging with those

closest to the work or the change, I was attempting to manipulate the work to arrive at answers I already had decided were "right." Predictably, I struggled with buy-in and commitment.

I spent significant energy attending to this problem during my graduate studies, and I was confident upon arriving in Bellingham that I had a better understanding of how to lead change with groups than I did as a principal. When I first engaged my work with my strategic project here, I felt the familiar pull of my own ego; I became convinced of the "right" answer, and I felt attached to it. With that mindset, going slowly felt cumbersome and unnecessary. It was also easy, in that state of mind, to create moral justifications for moving quickly. If I knew the right answer, as I was sure I did, and children depended upon us to enact that right answer (especially children who had been underserved until now), then to wait was to ask them to suffer longer to satisfy our need for patient deliberation.

I believe now that this moral justification was the shield I used to defend my own egoic assumptions about my capacity as an authority figure and a thinker. I started from the first assumption -- that I knew best what action to take -- and used the loaded language of justice and morality to reinforce my own sense of self. What I have learned, however, is that there is no reason to fully trust my first assumption and every reason to look at it critically. It is perfectly acceptable to have that assumption, but instead of clinging to it, I need to name and analyze it. I have observed staff modeling this exact behavior on numerous occasions and at different levels of Bellingham Public Schools. Ideas are to be examined, critiqued, and explored by as many stakeholder groups as is necessary to fully understand the best course of action.

This is precisely the skill I was encouraged to develop during this strategic project. In the early stages, despite my best intentions, I found myself convinced of a course of action and impatient with our pace. My impatience was shared by some members of the dual language team; it was contagious and could start to feed on itself. In my regular meetings with Dr. Baker, he routinely pointed out challenges or possible consequences to implementing our proposals that I had not considered. He was illustrating the need to continue to consider other perspectives and to look critically at the proposals. Given his ten years leading the district, he was able to anticipate scenarios I had never considered. However, his intent was not merely to demonstrate the superiority of his thinking and experience; he would also regularly point my attention to other groups to consult because they would see things neither of us had. For the solution to be owned by the community, the community must be engaged in its creation.

The persistent tension for me in this work has been between urgency and sustainability. How long must we wait before implementing a necessary program? How many stakeholder groups must be engaged? The tempting answer, given my new learning about leading adaptive change, would be that we wait long enough and engage enough groups until the change is adopted as right and necessary by the tipping-point majority of the community. Sometimes that is impossible, however. Sometimes urgency outweighs our capacity for patience. To be clear, it would not be accurate to paint Dr. Baker as a leader who deliberates excessively, putting off implementation indefinitely in order to quell every possible objection. Some changes in the district under Dr. Baker's leadership have moved quite swiftly. When I asked about these counterexamples, he shared with me that there are times when urgency wins, but in those cases, it is necessary to be absolutely

certain about the reasons for the change, knowing that the community will likely push back. In those instances, he added, the leader must believe that the need for change outweighs the risk. In other words, is this the proverbial hill a leader is willing to die on?

I will leave Bellingham with a greater appreciation for the careful approach. For change to be sustainable beyond the tenure of the leadership, it must be owned by the community. In most cases, that means careful deliberation and involvement of stakeholders. The answers the group comes up with are generally, albeit not universally, better than those arrived at by the leader alone.

What, then, is the leader's role? It is not merely to respond to the wishes of the community. Groups, by nature, do not want to change, even when they need to. The leader's role is to help them to imagine a greater vision for themselves and their community, then help them to make that vision a reality. My most salient personal learning is that I will need to be able to move in and out of any group I lead, sometimes engaging directly with the problems and challenges and sometimes getting "on the balcony" where I can name the challenges and the implications for the larger organization.

**Conclusions**

As a school district, Bellingham Public Schools prides itself on its coherent commitment to a system-wide set of priorities, *The Bellingham Promise* is a unique document that gives focus to the work of the district, and expresses the values of the community that underpin that work. More than a formality, the *Promise* is at the heart of everything this district does. This document, however, is not a static script. It is a living document that evolves with the changing needs and growing understanding of the district. When I entered as a resident, I was able to witness this firsthand. For the first time in years, Bellingham was rolling out a new iteration of *The Promise*. A new central pillar, one of the key strategies, explicitly committed the district and its resources to a set of equitable, diverse, and inclusive goals. While the district has always implicitly and deliberately supported equity -- embedded in the document as the "One Schoolhouse" principle -- they were now giving themselves a clear mission to disrupt inequity where they could. It has been fascinating and heartening to watch and participate in a system that took this work seriously and organized itself for learning, not merely executing tasks and producing outcomes.

It is within this change to the culture that I entered the district to facilitate a project that has direct implications for equity and how we serve some of our historically underserved student populations. This work started long before I came, and it will continue long after I leave. For a brief time, I came in and offered my facilitation to a team of educators who were ready to do the work. At some points, I am certain it felt like an affront to have a doctoral resident adopt a stream of work that others had been engaging with for years. And now, because I had arrived, the work was moving forward?

That was an initial challenge, for the team and for me, but we chose together to see it differently. I was merely adding my capacity to the already-powerful group in a role as organizer, facilitator, and servant-leader. It was my role to help them give shape and form to the work they had been engaging with for some time.

Dual-language programming, given the research supporting its effectiveness for second-language learners, could seem like an obvious and necessary educational intervention to adopt. I am certain that most of the members of our team I helped felt this way. And as a technical solution to a technical problem, they were right. The larger truth of system leadership, however, is that charging forward with a technical solution to what is actually an adaptive problem could be a disastrous setback. For the brief time I played a role in this work, we addressed adaptive challenges of the larger problem. Reallocating resources, changing individual school identities, moving teachers and administrators, all within a larger system that serves many children of different identity groups, is adaptive work. Our work, for the time I was here to serve, was to stay "in the heat" and wrestle with the adaptive challenges.

In recent weeks, in discussion with Dr. Baker, he has begun to shift his focus in how he discussed this challenge. For the duration of my residency, he has consistently returned to a central question: "If this program is life changing, how can we only offer it to some students, and not all of them?" In recent weeks, he has begun to ask other questions: "How can we deliver to *all* students in Bellingham the possibility of being bilingual in Spanish and English? If we do that, can dual language be the means by which we offer this to some of our students?" These questions reflect a change in how this challenge is being thought about. Not surprisingly, perhaps, they are rooted in one of the

key outcomes of the *Bellingham Promise* -- to have all graduates be multilingual readers and speakers. This question changes the way we can discuss the adoption of a dual-language school model. From this perspective, all students can have access to Spanish and English, and one of the ways we deliver this is through dual-language schooling. This solves the problem of unequally opportunity by redefining "opportunity," then delivering opportunities *equitably*. Part of the challenge is in embracing the likely sense of loss those within the system and outside of it will likely feel and express. What new value is created as a result of that cost? The answer to that is central to the political success of this program.

I have enduring questions about my own role and my future leadership as I approach the end of this phase of the work. Will my future role be to continue to facilitate the work others are already attempting? Is that kind of service leadership merely responsive to the existing values of other people, or could part of the facilitator role be for me to shape the work by my values as well? Did I even lead in this process, or was I simply a receptacle and a conduit for others' interests? I believe it is impossible to separate myself and my core values from the work. Once I enter the work, even as a facilitator, I change the nature of the work with my presence. However, leadership also means removing myself from the central focus and allowing others to take ownership and control of the process.

This phase of the work will end without resolution. It is not clear that a dual-language school will open in the fall of a coming school year, but there is a solid chance that it will. And if it does, it will be because dedicated educators in Bellingham worked from a core set of values that honor all students and their individual and unique needs.

And if that school does open, it will be owned by all levels of the school district and by all stakeholder groups in the community, because that is how change happens in Bellingham Public Schools.

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**Appendix A: Questions and Concerns from Dr. Baker**

## Dual Language Discussion
September 17, 2019

**Different reasons for dual language**
- One reason is to support all students becoming multilingual readers and speakers as called out by The Bellingham Promise Key Outcomes. Might this be framed as part of a larger initiative to ensure all students become multilingual; other strategies might include world language at all schools; Promise International...
- Another reason is to specifically support exceptional students who receive ELL services.
- Ideally, we would be able to achieve both; but if not, do we focus on the second one specifically?
- If so, there are different ways to build a dual language experience.

**Option 1: Change a neighborhood school to a dual language school**
- Is the whole school dual language or just a track?
- If it's a track, and we are building 3 section schools, what would that look like, or do you really need a 4 section school?
- If one track, thus the entire school is dual language:
  - What if families don't want that type of experience?
    - Do they transfer?
    - Do we provide transportation?
    - If so, how much would that cost and if not, then how do we handle the issue of who has access to transfer and who doesn't?
- What if families from other attendance areas want to transfer in?
  - Do we allow it?
  - If so, do we provide transportation? If not, who is having access vs not?
  - How would we choose who gets in?
    - Lottery?
    - ELL Students?
- If we have only one dual language school and we allow transfers, for say ELL students only, and say it's Spanish, are we possibly creating a school that becomes only Spanish students and inadvertently decreasing the diversity at all our other schools?

**Option 2: Build a new school (i.e. King Mt) and open it as a dual language school**
- Would it be a magnet/city-wide school, open to everyone, similar to Family Partnership Program and Options HS?
  - How would we provide transportation? Up to the parents like the FPP? Or city bus like OHS? Or school bus and if so, what would the costs be to pick up kids from all over the city?
  - Would this be open to all families or targeted to ELL?
- Would it be a neighborhood school? And thus the key questions from above.

**If we moved forward with any of these models, what would the implications be for:**
- Staffing
- Increased costs such as curriculum, professional development...
- Transfers
- Scalability – would we just build one PK-5 Dual Language School? Or would we anticipate others? MS or HS?

**To keep in mind:**
- History of Wade King and IB
- Life changing program that if offered we don't want to say no to anyone, but instead we increase services, i.e. Life Skills, Bridges and GRADS vs great to have, i.e. IB, ES world language, HS electives...

**Appendix B**: Norms agreed upon by Dual-language Committee
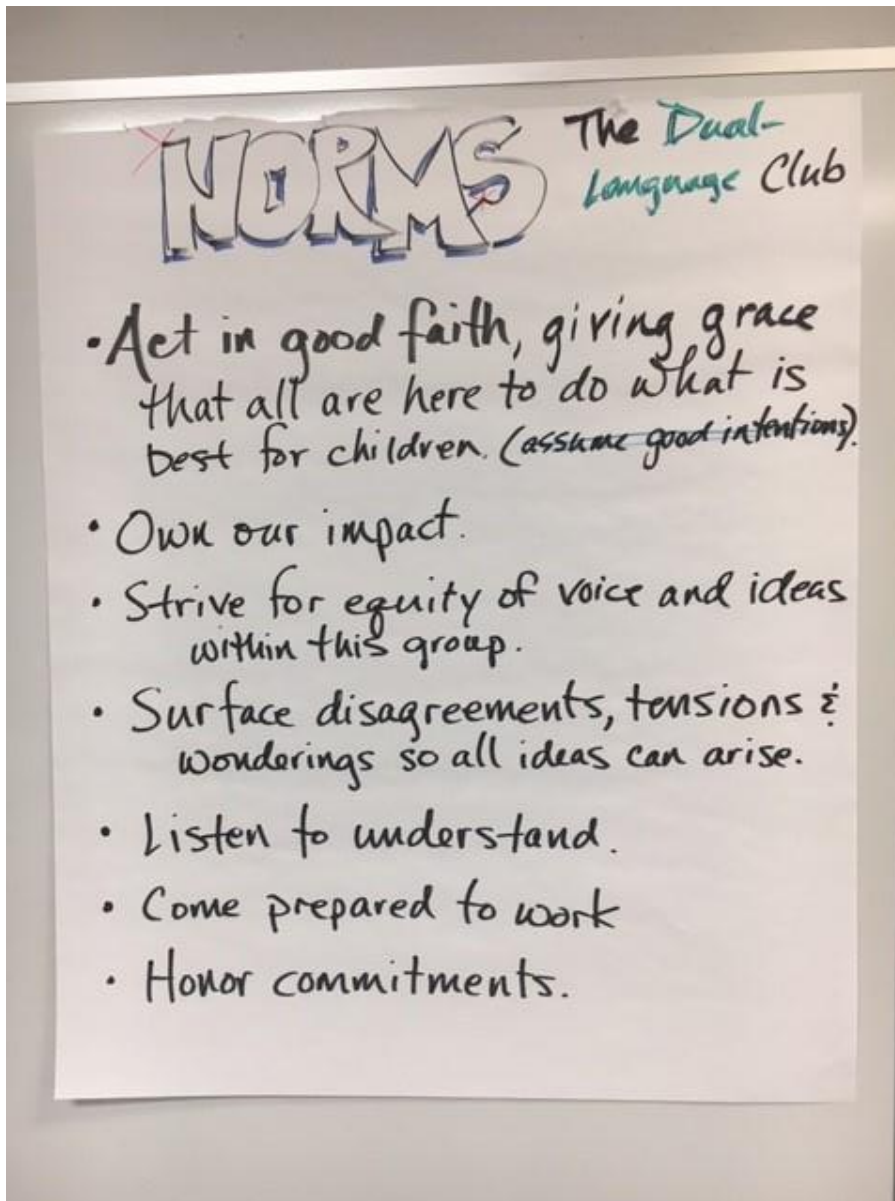
**Appendix C** : Dual Language Concept Memo Draft 4.0

# memo

# Bellingham Public Schools

To:         Dr. Greg Baker, Superintendent

From:       <u>Informal Dual Language Work Group</u>: Bethany Barrett, Amy Carder, Steve
            Clarke, Mike Copland, Kristi Dominguez, Sarah Ferris, Lance Huffman Jay
            Jordan, Isabel Meaker, Micah Smith, Sally Unger, and Matt Whitten

CC:         Jackie Brawley, Kurt Gazow, Bob Kuehl, Simone Sangster

Date:       Wednesday Nov. 27, 2019

Re:         Dual Language Program Concept

## Introduction

In response to questions posed by superintendent Greg Baker, an informal dual
language work group convened in the fall of 2019 that endeavored to paint a picture of
what a dual language program roll-out could look like in Bellingham Public Schools.
Specifically he tasked the team with considering out how dual language program
participation in Bellingham would be fair and accessible for all students who have this
need, and how we would assure that such programs do not create inequities based on
how we allow/select access to them. Thus, the informal dual language work group is a
visioning body, not a decision-making body.  All recommendations within this document
are intended to support the superintendent and executive team to understand why dual
language is a high-leverage strategy for equity, diversity and inclusion; and to picture
what such a program could look like in Bellingham.  Any actual
decisions/recommendations regarding the creation of dual language programs would
require extensive, system-wide involvement and collaboration with all impacted stake-
holder groups through the advisory committee process.

## Vision, Mission, Outcomes

*The **Bellingham Promise** states that our students "will graduate from our schools
prepared for success" and that "all students will be exceptional in their own way,"
yet our district academic achievement and growth data indicate that we are not
fulfilling this promise for many of our minoritized student populations—particularly
<u>English language learners and Latinx students</u>. Creating dual language programs in
our schools will support the positive outcome of all students in becoming
"multilingual readers and speakers," but more importantly, the research on the
unparalleled effectiveness of dual language instruction indicates that such programs*

*will allow access to **all** promise outcomes that are currently unattainable for <u>many of our minoritized students.</u>*

## Problem Statement and Theory of Action

Bellingham Public Schools has made significant strides in the past decade to reimagine and improve support for English language learners resulting in positive outcomes such as <u>improved graduation rates for English learners</u>. However, the current average <u>rate at which Spanish-speaking ELLs reach English proficiency is slower than expected</u>, and a significant <u>academic achievement gap</u> persists between non-ELL Latinx students and white students across all grade levels and at all schools within our system. We are aware of research indicating that dual language programs support Spanish-speakers in achieving more equitable outcomes, and it is our responsibility to explore system possibilities based on this knowledge.

If we create high-quality, scalable, K-12, Spanish/English two-way dual language instructional programs beginning at the elementary level that build throughout the district over time; and if ELL and Latinx students are afforded the opportunity to access such programs…

Then the achievement gap will be closed not only by Spanish-speaking English learners and Latinx students, but also by <u>other historically low-performing groups.</u> These populations will graduate from our system bilingual, biliterate, having learned at high academic levels. All students participating in dual language programs will gain socio-cultural competence that fosters a positive sense of their own and others' ethnic, linguistic and cultural identities.

## Dual Language Program Components

*The informal Dual Language Work Group is offering examples of two different potential program models—the "Neighborhood/Partner School" model and the "One Schoolhouse" model.  These models are not mutually exclusive; the district could eventually adopt one or both to enhance access throughout the system. Regardless of model, however, there are many components of dual language programs that our team believes should be consistent across programs based on what we have learned from <u>best practice research on dual language.</u>  These are listed below:*

- Program Details:
  - **Goals**: (1) Bilingualism, (2) Biliteracy, (3) High Academic Achievement, (4) Socio-cultural competence.
  - **Program Structure:** Whole school model (rather than a dual language track within the school.)
  - **Student Demographic**: Minimum of 50% native Spanish speakers, 50% other students.
  - **Language Allocation**: Ideally 90% of instruction in Spanish and 10% instruction in English beginning in Kindergarten increasing to 50% instruction in Spanish and 50% instruction in English by 4th or 5th grade.

- Program Staff:
  - Teachers would have K-8 elementary certification as well as a bilingual education endorsement.
  - Teachers would be bilingual and biliterate in English and Spanish with native or near-native proficiency in the language in which they teach.
  - Recruiting would include maximizing and expanding our existing "grow your own" pipelines—CTE Bilingual Teacher Academy Program, Partnership with Bilingual Fellows program at WWU etc.

- Program Scalability:
  - Regardless of model, the dual language programs would begin at the elementary level in a limited number of schools, then expand to include more schools.
  - All students who participate in a dual language program at the elementary level would have access to continued content courses taught in Spanish at the middle and high school levels.
  - Concurrent with the expansion of dual language programs would be the expansion of Spanish as World Language Immersion at non-dual language elementary schools.

## The Neighborhood / Partner School Example

*Some components of the two examples featured would be different.  Below are the program considerations that would be unique to the Neighborhood / Partner School Model.*

- **Students / Families:**
  - In this model, each dual language school would have a designated partner school in close geographical proximity.
  - Students who live in the attendance area of a designated dual language school would automatically enroll in and attend that school as long as they wish to participate in the dual language program.  If they *do not* want to be part of the dual language program, they would request to attend their English only "partner school," and they would be admitted if there is space. Available "space" would

be determined by the need to maintain a student population of 50% Spanish-speakers and 50% other students at the dual language school.

- o Students who live in the partner school attendance area who *do not* wish to participate in the dual language program would enroll in and attend their English-only neighborhood school.  If they *do* want to participate in a dual language program, they would request to attend the dual language school that is partnered with their neighborhood school and would be admitted if there is space.
- o Any school chosen to be a dual language school in this model would be a school with an existing high population of Spanish-speaking students, and the partner school would be a nearby school with a much lower population of Spanish-speaking students.

- **Transportation**: Transportation would be provided for all students at the dual language and partner schools regardless of whether they go to the school that is within their attendance boundary.  Since both schools are in close geographical proximity, the added transportation cost would be minimal.

- **Adaptive Change Considerations**:

  A major adaptive change in the neighborhood/partner school example would involve navigating transfers of students between the dual language school and its partner elementary school. The ways in which these transfer requests are prioritized, accepted and/or declined would need to occur via a well-communicated, equitable process. Another challenge would involve changing out the teaching staff at the dual language school over time (minimum of one grade level per year beginning with kindergarten) to a dual language endorsed, Spanish-speaking staff. Prior experiences/case studies in our system that we could learn from and that might inform these challenges would be our work with the boundary change committee and the way in which we handled transfer requests to Wade King when it opened as a new "IB" school. Finally, in addition to in-school and inter-school levels of adaptive change, the creation of a dual language program in an existing neighborhood school would also have implications for the entire school system.

## The One Schoolhouse Example

*Below are the program considerations that would be unique to the One Schoolhouse Dual Language example.*

- **Students / Families:**
    - o The One Schoolhouse dual language school would have no specific attendance boundary. All students/families in Bellingham Public Schools would need to apply in order to attend.
    - o Applications would be accepted on a lottery basis, and acceptance would be determined by the need to maintain a student population of 50% Spanish speakers and 50% other students.
    - o The "lottery" would include the following prioritization: (1) students within walking distance of the One Schoolhouse School, (2) students within Bellingham Public Schools attendance area, and (3) if not all slots are filled, students from outside the district boundary.
    - o The school chosen to be the One Schoolhouse dual language school would either be (1) an existing neighborhood school that "closes" and "reopens" as a new program, or (2) it would be in a newly constructed elementary or K-8.

- **Transportation**: Transportation would be provided for all families who were chosen to attend the One Schoolhouse dual language school via the lottery process. To minimize cost, we could use a "Promise K" transportation model in which elementary students arrive at their neighborhood schools as they ordinarily would. Then the dual language bus collects them at their neighborhood schools and delivers them to the One Schoolhouse dual language school. To support this unique transportation model, The One Schoolhouse dual language school could run on a later, middle school schedule—9:15-3:45.

- **Adaptive Change Considerations**:

  The nature of adaptive change involved in the One-Schoolhouse dual language example depends on whether we (1) convert and existing neighborhood school into the One Schoolhouse dual language school, or (2) create the One-Schoolhouse dual language program in a newly built school like King Mountain or "returning diaspora" situation like the re-opening of Birchwood Elementary.

    - o The process of "closing" an *existing* school and reopening it as a new dual language program would require changes to elementary school boundaries, hiring a new staff, and assembling a new community of students and families drawn from throughout the district. The case study in our system that would most closely inform a transition to this version of the One-Schoolhouse example would be the closing of Larrabee Elementary and reopening of the facility as the Bellingham Family Partnership Program.
    - o Opening a *new* school as the One-Schoolhouse Dual Language program—for example, a 15th elementary school on the King Mountain property, or a "returning diaspora" to Sunnyland when it re-opens--would also involve significant adaptive changes. However, it would not likely require redrawing elementary attendance boundaries nor involuntarily displacing teachers from their current school.

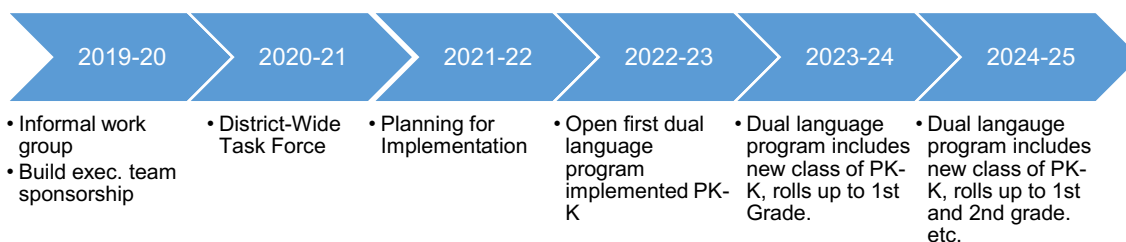| Advantages and Challenges | of Each Model |
|---|---|
| Neighborhood/Partner School  | One Schoolhouse  |
| • Transportation costs are minimized by using the partner school model. Students not attending the neighborhood school attend a partner school that is nearby. <br> • Ability to keep high ELL residential communities together—Sterling Meadows, Eliza Court, Villa Santa Fe, etc. <br> • Builds on an already robust population/community of native Spanish-speaking students and families. <br> • Proximity to school (dual language or nearby partner school) allows for easier family access to school programs and events. | • Selection for participation in dual language program perceived as more "fair."  Based on random chance rather than zip code <br> • English learners from throughout the district including the underserved south side have a chance at accessing the highest quality ELL program. (Dual Language) <br> • No danger of intentional gentrification (families with means move into the attendance boundary of the dual language school) <br> • Cohesive program initiation—all staff and students begin at the dual language school at the same time, (though the dual language program itself begins at Kindergarten and rolls up year by year—see timeline) |

# Q & A

**What might a timeline look like for the roll out of dual language programs in Bellingham?**

- Regardless of program example, the following would be a plausible timeline for moving toward dual language implementation in Bellingham Public Schools:

| 2019-20 | 2020-21 | 2021-22 | 2022-23 | 2023-24 | 2024-25 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| • Informal work group<br>• Build exec. team sponsorship | • District-Wide Task Force | • Planning for Implementation | • Open first dual language program implemented PK-K | • Dual language program includes new class of PK-K, rolls up to 1st Grade. | • Dual langauge program includes new class of PK-K, rolls up to 1st and 2nd grade. etc. |

**In this timeline example, we only see on dual language school/program. How might we eventually make such programs available to all students in Bellingham who have this need? (Spanish-speaking English learners and Latinx students?)**

- Currently, there are 1,151 students in Bellingham Public Schools at the elementary level who speak Spanish. This includes students who qualify for the ELL program, those who have exited, and those who never qualified for the program. If we eventually opened 5 dual language school-wide programs (each with a partner school) as well as a One Schoolhouse dual language school, there will be enough space in our dual language programs for 1,200 Spanish speaking students—this would include **all** Spanish-speaking students in our system regardless of zip code. This assumes that we place dual language programs at our largest elementary schools, and that we strive to maintain a 50/50 split of our student demographic between Spanish speakers and other students. This is one vision that demonstrates how all students in the district who need this program would be able to access it.

# It is clear that Spanish/English two-way dual language programs support the achievement of Spanish-speaking students. What about other students?

- Research on dual language programs by Thomas and Collier clearly indicates that as a result of dual language learning, the achievement gap can be closed not only by English learners, but also by other historically low-performing groups such as African Americans and students of low socioeconomic status. These findings are confirmed by Thomas and Collier's five-year long longitudinal research of two-way dual language schools across seven school districts in North Carolina.

- Native English-speaking students who participate in dual language programs would begin learning a second language at an early age. This would allow them to develop native-like pronunciation as well as enough time to become *fully* bilingual and biliterate by the time they graduate.  Also, working with language expert peers in the partner language helps English only students and teachers develop a strength-based attitude toward English learning peers—they would see and value them as the exceptional students that they are.

## It's clear that dual language programs are great for all students. Then how do we continue to support the English only students and English learners at *non*-dual language schools?

- Even with a full roll out of dual language programs in Bellingham, there would still be English learners at non-dual language schools who would need teachers who have the knowledge and skills to make content comprehensible for English learners.  This means we would need to continue to train and develop teachers in sheltered instruction strategies (SIOP, GLAD,) and we would need to maintain a strong team of ELL staff who would provide newcomer support as well as co-teaching, co-planning and collaboration with classroom teachers to support their on-going sheltered instruction practice.

- For native English-speaking students at non-dual language schools, we would want them to develop an appreciation for languages and cultures other than their own through some level of exposure.  All non-dual language schools could follow the lead of IB schools by providing an immersion world language class at least once weekly for every student at non-dual language schools.

## How would we recruit enough teachers who are fluent in Spanish and who have bilingual education endorsement?

- We would begin by strengthening and growing our existing "grow your own" pathways for bilingual/bicultural staff and students to become teachers in our school district. Two existing "pipelines" are the CTE Bilingual Teacher Academy Program, and our Partnership with Bilingual Fellows program at WWU etc.

- In addition, while we currently only have 4 teachers in Bellingham Public Schools who have a bilingual education teaching certificate and who are fluent in Spanish, we have 102 teachers with an ELL endorsement, 12 of whom are fluent Spanish speakers.  A possible strategy for increasing potential dual language instructional staff would involve providing opportunities for teachers with ELL endorsements to take the 2 tests required add a bilingual education endorsement.

**What would a dual language program look like at the middle school and high school level?**

- We know that to truly achieve the outcome of "multilingual readers and speakers," dual language learning and world language classes would need to continue at the middle school and high school levels.  For students who participated in dual language programs at elementary, they would need to have access to content classes taught in the partner language (6th grade math taught in Spanish, World History taught in Spanish, etc.) at both the middle school and high school level.  Exactly how this would work at the middle school level was not a scenario was fleshed out by the informal dual language work group. We would need more attention/consideration of secondary dual language models if our district decides to move forward with elementary dual language program implementation.

# Conclusion

*We ask that the superintendent and executive team offer their approval and sponsorship for the creation of a district-wide Dual Language Advisory Committee that will work toward a recommendation to the superintendent for how we could make dual language programs a reality in Bellingham Public Schools. Doing so would help close the achievement gap for English learners as well as historically low-performing groups, and it would offer the opportunity for [near-native bilingualism](#) and cross-cultural understanding for traditionally English-only students. This is difficult, adaptive work, but it is the right work, and we owe it to our minoritized students and families to have the courage to pursue it.*

**Appendix D**: Executive Cabinet Agenda - January 28, 2020

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# Executive Team

*January 28, 2020*

*8:30-11:00*

Jackie (Fac), Jay (Notes)

- **<u>Weekly Check-In:</u>**
  - Celebrations, Acknowledgements, Progress Toward Goals
  - Actions taken by self/others in support of our Equity Diversity and Inclusion Strategy


- ***<u>Strategic Topics</u>***
  - Dual Language Discussion – 8:30 AM


- ***<u>Tactical Topic</u>***
- Calendar Discussion
- District Leadership Team Meeting Agenda


***<u>Updates, Feedback and Calendar</u>***

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**Appendix E:** Healthy Youth Survey Data comparing Latinx students with whole population