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Focus: Culturally Sustaining Leadership

Why Emergent Bilingual Education Needs Equity-Centered Pedagogies

by Lizdelia Piñón, Ed.D.

As I worked toward earning my education administration certificate at a university in Chicago, I reflected on how my leadership efforts serve emergent bilingual students (English learners). Because I had been a bilingual educator for many years, I had established ways to help my students be successful. Also to stay current, I regularly reviewed research on the latest methods, strategies and systems for educating emergent bilingual students.

I noticed that the content of many of my educational leadership classes did not include information about serving emergent bilingual students. Ways to serve these students' specific linguistic needs and embrace their culture received no attention in any of my courses' case studies or lectures presented by the faculty. They were not mentioned in discussions about how we could help all students receive an equitable and excellent, high-quality education.

I also noted that equity-centered concepts were not applied across all schools and classrooms. Like teachers, few school administrators receive preparation to serve emergent bilingual students.

As a result, emergent bilingual students are left behind, as seen in their low four-year graduation rate of 69%, compared to 86% of other students nationally (NCES, 2020). On the 2019 National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), there was a 33-point difference in fourth-grade reading proficiency between emergent bilingual students and their peers. Only 10% of emergent bilingual fourth-graders and 4% of eighth-graders scored at or above proficiency in reading. In contrast, among non-emergent bilingual students 39% of fourth-graders and 36% of eighth-graders scored at or above proficiency in reading. (White, et al., 2021; Schwartz, 2021)

Moreover, the pandemic disproportionately affected emergent bilingual students (Sahakyan & Cook, 2021). They were less likely than their peers to have the devices, connectivity and digital literacy skills essential to access their schools' virtual learning programs (Williams & Marcus, 2022).

Piecemealing equity in education without structured programming is clearly not working. School leaders must be knowledgeable about bilingualism, bilingual education and their schools' emergent bilingual student populations (Brooks, et al., 2010; Sánchez & Menken, 2020). It is time to boost standards with culturally sustaining, equity-centered pedagogies (Paris, et al., 2017).

Caldera (2021) discusses how the term *culturally sustaining practices* captures IDRA's vision for ensuring students receive equitable school-

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Given our nation's unique, rich cultural and linguistic diversity, we should be leading in our pedagogical approach by lifting up the inherent assets students bring into the classroom, so more students graduate multilingual and multicultural.

– Celina Moreno, J.D., IDRA President & CEO

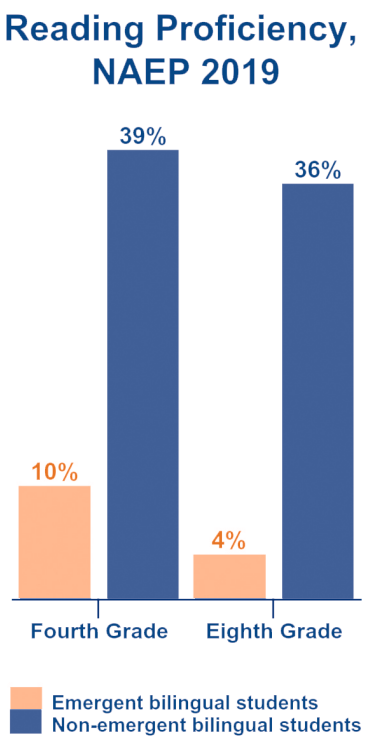
(Why Emergent Bilingual Education Needs Equity-Centered Pedagogies, continued from Page 1)

ing. Culturally sustaining school leaders create policies for programs and language, set and monitor expectations, and coach educators to facilitate and successfully implement culturally sustaining instruction in the classroom (2021). They also set high standards and expectations for academic performance regardless of how educators perceive the performance abilities of students of diverse groups.

One culturally sustaining practice is to build on the home languages represented in the school community. Translanguaging strategies, for example, can involve posting cognate walls in different areas of the school, providing content materials in home languages, using bilingual glossaries or dictionaries when students are literate in their home language, intentionally having teachers group students who share a common language, and sending bilingual homework rather than in English only.

School leaders must be able to create and maintain a climate free from any implicit biases toward students regardless of race, ethnicity or native language. The school community must actively engage its marginalized families and communities to improve decision-making and solution-seeking schoolwide. Families' cultural histories represent critical aspects of school and community history.

Culturally sustaining leaders do not merely ensure teachers provide emergent bilingual students with a strong multilingual, multicultural education. They also facilitate the cultural conversion in the education environment to ensure that emergent bilingual students succeed and that the assets they bring receive respect and attention from all stakeholders, including educators, families, other students, and members of the school's external community. These students will, of course, also impact the future progress and economic status of the nation (IDRA, 2021).



The IDRA EAC-*South* rolled out a set of materials on culturally sustaining instruction and leadership to support educators with tools for challenging, investigating and embracing a vision for engaging with families and students from marginalized communities (2021). The materials include an easy-to-reference list of equity-centered pedagogies to help school leaders determine how to serve their particular student populations better. For more information see Page 3 and the IDRA EAC-*South* website (www.idraeachsouth.org).

Resources

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Four Leverage Points for Culturally Sustaining Practices

by Paula Johnson, Ph.D., and Hector Bojorquez

In our work, particularly through the IDRA EAC-*South*, IDRA has framed current research around culturally sustaining education into four quadrants that represent practices at the following critical levels: (1) culturally sustaining schools, (2) culturally sustaining leadership, (3) culturally sustaining educators, and (4) culturally sustaining pedagogy.

These four leverage points represent components of the educational ecosystem that can be transformed by culturally sustaining practices to better serve marginalized students of color. Defining what culturally sustaining practices look like in these four levels also aids in identifying data points, situating student outcomes through an equity lens, identifying capacity building needs, and creating spaces for continuous community input and support. Simply, framing leverage points as critical levels gives educational stakeholders a way to quantify steps for successfully implementing culturally sustaining practices.

Culturally Sustaining Schools

Culturally sustaining schools address fundamental equity concerns by holding high expectations for students and providing the highest levels of support for all students to succeed. Success in a culturally sustaining school is defined by preparation for college and career readiness in an environment that is supportive, is asset-conscious and fosters positive cultural identity.

The school also is responsible for placing the histories of all students and families in the context of academic awareness of the contributions, struggles and individual experiences of racial/ethnic groups formerly underrepresented in curriculum and historical narratives.

Ultimately, the culturally sustaining school seeks the highest levels of achievement in an environment that transforms education to recognize that the history, struggles, achievements and contributions of the racially underrepresented populations it serves are fundamental to economic progress, cultural heritage and social dynamics of this country.

Culturally Sustaining Leadership

The culturally sustaining school leader creates policies and coaches faculty to facilitate successful implementation of culturally sustaining instruction.

This leader also sets and monitors standards and expectations for high academic success regardless of perceived performance abilities. This means that the campus leader addresses implicit biases toward racial/ethnic groups. This leader also centers marginalized families and communities as important in decision making, solution-seeking and key to cultural histories.

A culturally sustaining leader does not simply provide a better multicultural education but transforms the educational environment where all students succeed, and their identities are seen as integral to our history, progress and economic future.

Culturally Sustaining Educators

Educators are the first adult faces students see as they walk into an early childhood setting and are important influences throughout their school lives. It is the experiences that educators provide that have the most impact on students and ultimately define the nature of that relationship. And in the case of students of color these experiences must be provided by educators who understand the entirety of students' experiences.

The research on what educators must provide and what they must understand has grown over the past 30 years. The culturally sustain-

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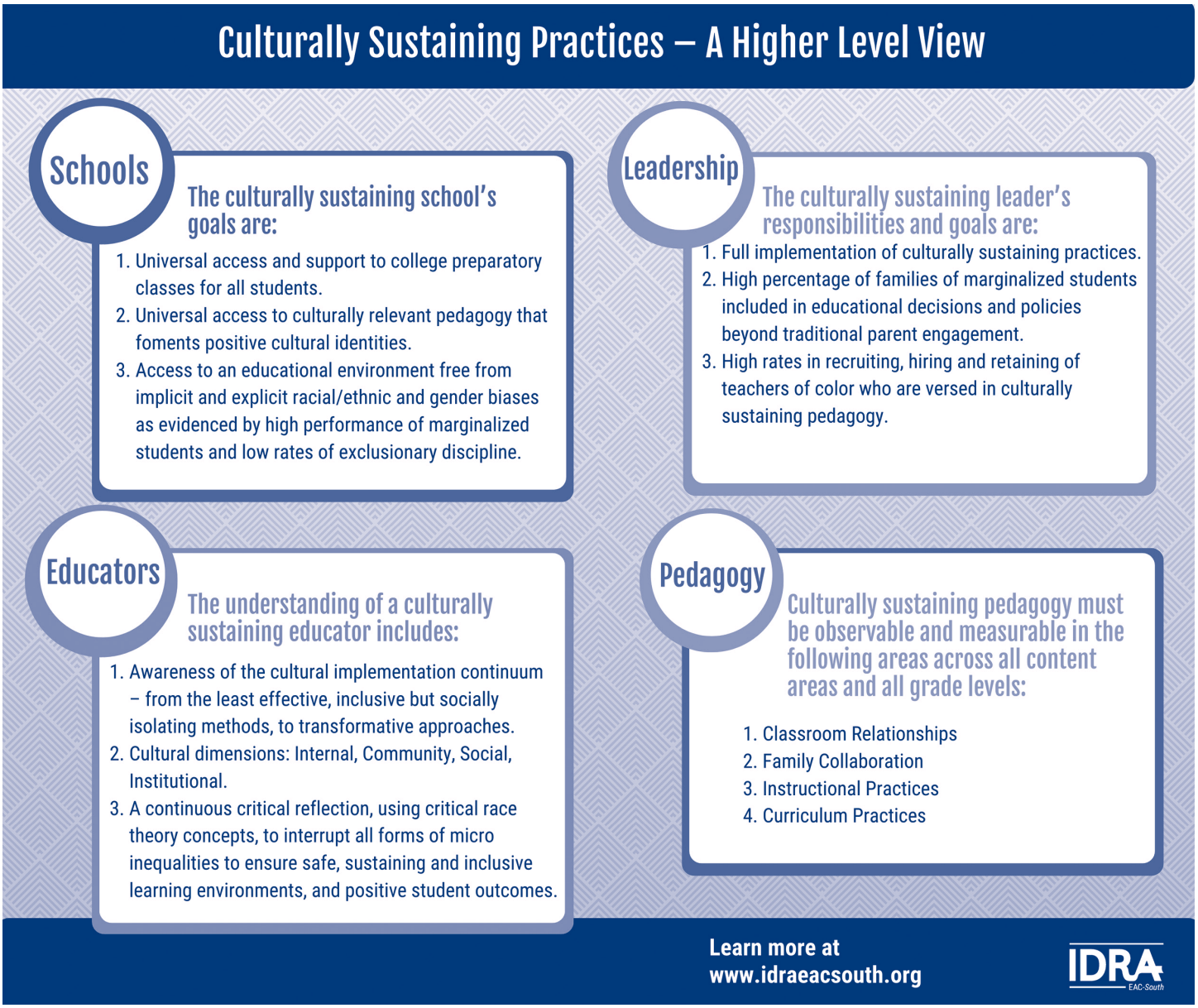
(Four Leverage Points for Culturally Sustaining Practices, continued from Page 3)



ing educator moves curriculum, pedagogy and practices forward from the least effective multicultural practices of the past to those that center democratic principles and activist practices in the context of marginalized student experiences and their struggles.

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

In the spirit of expanding the definition of best teaching practices and pedagogy, this leverage point is based on the Culturally Responsive Instruction Observation Protocol (CRIOP) (Powell, et al., 2017). It provides a framework for identifying observable behaviors of a culturally sustaining education.

It is important to note that, in and of themselves, many of the practices described in the protocol have the possibility of impacting educational practices only if they are situated in the racial and ethnic context of students' lived experiences. Instructors must explicitly understand that these practices are responses to systemic racism, implicit and explicit biases and power dynamics of underrepresented and oppressed groups.

IDRA recommends the following CRIOP indicators found in the quadrant: classroom relationships, family collaboration, instructional practices and curriculum practices.

A companion bibliography is available at https://www.idraeacsouth.org.

Paula N. Johnson, Ph.D., is an IDRA senior education associate and director of the IDRA EAC-South. Comments and questions may be directed to her via email at paula.johnson@idra.org. Hector Bojorquez is IDRA's director of operations and educational practice. Comments and questions may be directed to him via email at hector.bojorquez@idra.org.

Lessons Learned from Principals on Valuing, Safeguarding and Healing Students

by Aurelio M. Montemayor, M.Ed.

School principals balance many skills, demands and stakeholders. Powerful school leadership involves structure, modeling and deliberate action to create a school environment that is *valuing* (each student feels special and perceived through their assets), *safe* (students feel protected) and *healing* (hurts and painful experiences are dealt with over time).

The **valuing principal** is rooted in a deep understanding of the many assets each student has and the gifts that come from students' families. These leaders reject social prejudices and myths attached to families, their neighborhood or class and replace them with celebration and inclusion of everything a student is, represents and brings from home.

Last summer, IDRA convened a panel of principals who served diverse student populations (IDRA, 2021). Dr. Timothy Vaughn from Edgewood ISD, Rawan Hammoudeh from San Antonio ISD and Jorge Cruz of Southwest ISD, and IDRA's Dr. Nilka Avilés attested to the power of modeling high expectations for all students and considering each individual student as having high potential both academically and socially.

"My vision for my students is that regardless of their socio-economic status, their race or ethnicity, they have access to a high-quality and equitable educational experience so that they are well prepared for a successful future," said Rawan Hammoudeh, principal of Agnes Cotton Academy in San Antonio ISD.

Instructional lessons should engage students in a rigorous understanding of cultures, histories and contributions. Students are more likely to feel welcome and to engage when educators recognize the merit of diversity of cultures, languages and histories. Classrooms should be celebrations of all these things.

IDRA senior education associate, Dr. Nilka Avilés previously served as a middle school principal and oversaw a successful early college high school for students who had not been considered capable of doing college level work. She described the importance of just greeting students each day: "I would stand at the door every morning and greet each student and ask them to say the phrase, 'I am the best.'" And her teachers would greet each student at the classroom door by name with positive, individual greetings.

IDRA's close to 40-year experience with our Valued Youth Partnership program has connected us with hundreds of principals who have brought to their school a program that inherently sees assets in all students. In the Valued Youth Partnership, school leaders select students who are not excelling and appoints them as tutors of younger children. The tutors are supported and even compensated for their contribution. The term "valuing" is no longer just a feel-good, abstract concept. Students actually *experience* being valued and valuing others, and the adults in the school recognize the students' leadership. (Bojorquez, 2021)

A **safeguarding principal** is directly involved with teachers and students, helping to identify struggling students and getting resources they may urgently need. Such principals assist teachers to gain insights into students' behavior, become aware of and address rumors or speculation that may be spreading, and address issues before they become more difficult or even dangerous to resolve.

We must protect vulnerable students. Gender, sexuality and racial-ethnic sensitivities require campus administrators to act in defense and support of any student who feels threatened or attacked. Taking action to interrupt harm-

(cont. on Page 6)

Students are more likely to feel welcome and to engage when educators recognize the merit of diversity of cultures, languages and histories.

(Lessons Learned from Principals on Valuing, Safeguarding and Healing Students, continued from Page 5)

ful behavior models for everyone the peaceful standards of a school (Brion-Meisels, et al., 2022).

Being present in the classroom also enables principals to observe teachers, become aware of the resources or additional training they may need, and support them with coaching. All of this, too, can be a factor in improving school safety: When principals are present in the classroom, teachers and principals can work together to promptly address a student's emotional and social well-being.

Dr. Avilés said, "I would make sure to visit each classroom, interact with the students, notice what they were doing and praise the good work but also give a nudge to those not engaged."

Having more time in the classroom enables a principal to reinforce a climate of trust among students and teachers, even while deepening their own authority and strengthening their positions of leadership.

There are some key tools to help safeguarding principals invoke and facilitate campus-wide acceptance. Restorative practices can be aligned with schoolwide positive behavior intervention support (Johnson, 2021). The Second Step program is a research-based social-emotional learning curriculum used in elementary settings (https://www.secondstep.org). The Responsive Classroom model is an evidenced-based, classroom-level, social/emotional learning intervention (https://www.responsiveclassroom.org) (Rimm-Kaufman, 2006).

The **healing principal** is aware of the effects of bullying, harassment and other ways students are harmed at school. Schoolwide systems and approaches create an environment where effective and practical attention mends wounds – physical, mental or emotional – and keeps the learning environment positive and continuous. Educators must address toxic behaviors and attitudes while reducing interruptions to learning and growth.

Dr. Avilés said: "I would immediately talk to the student and find out what happened. I would listen to all involved."

While modeling these qualities, the healing principal reinforces the systemic benefits of the tools in place: restorative practices, positive behavior intervention, and social-emotional learning approaches and interventions. Some community building activities that have roots in old cultural practices also enable participants to bring up old hurts and give some closure to past injuries. It is not so much the personal charisma as the intelligent application of effective evidence-based practices that supports the healing.

The listening, woven into all effective actions and programs, gives life and strength to a school to support academic excellence for all students with the necessary safety and healing.

Dr. Avilés, Dr. Vaughn, Ms. Rawan Hammoudeh and Mr. Cruz attest to the power of listening to everyone in a school: the student who has been hurt and the one who caused it; the teacher who is overwhelmed with adolescent behavior and the one who doesn't see the assets in each child; and the parents who want to make sure their child is on a college path.

Deep and persistent listening helps the principal acknowledge the assets in each student, the path to positive engagement for each one, and the direction for solutions to challenges and problems. An effective school is one that values all students, and they have ample evidence every day that each is special. Principals hold the power to ensure the school environment is one where healing happens and learning blossoms.

Resources

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Being a Culturally Curious Educator Supports Positive Mental Health for Students

by Mia Covarrubias

As a future school counselor, I know when school mental health practices do not consider a child's cultural background, they do them a disservice. Children are in school eight hours per day, five days per week for at least 13 years of their young lives, during the most crucial time for brain development, emotional growth and knowledge expansion.

In a school setting, culturally sustaining leadership encompasses the ways administrators, teachers, mental health practitioners and anyone else interacting with children in that school can serve them in a way that enhances their learning experience. Cultural sustaining training, anti-racism training and underlying bias training equip educators to better serve students, particularly minoritized students.

In my training and experience as a school counselor graduate student, I have learned that when children see themselves reflected in what they are learning, they inherently achieve better academic outcomes (Wun, 2018). It helps them actively formulate a strong sense of self. When students have positive experiences in a school system, they are more likely to engage in learning and avoid negative behaviors (Be the Change Consulting, nd).

A student's academic success is nurtured by strong intrapersonal relationships between the educator and the student that help the student feel accepted (Ladson-Billings, 1995). IDRA research on keeping students in school and learning shows that there must be at least one educator in a student's life who is totally committed to the success of that student (Robledo Montecel, 2004).

In addition to students feeling valued and seen, this relationship creates a safe space for students to be vulnerable and lean on the trusted adults around them to receive the support they need and to grow.

Being a culturally aware or curious educator starts with figuring out your own biases and privileges (Andoh, 2021; Johnson 2018). Another facet to overcoming biases is to educate yourself in multicultural studies and research the work of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and people of color) academics.

It also means challenging the current and past research in the field of psychology recognizing the racist practices on which the field of psychology was founded. With culturally curious minds, the paradigm can be shifted to expand representation of diverse voices and research.

To me, being a culturally curious person means allowing myself to see how our society is built on a foundation that affects minoritized students and clients. When practitioners do not embrace cultural sensitivity or curiosity, they may misunderstand a situation and thus lead a student down a path that does not benefit their well-being (D'Aniello, et al., 2016). The same is true when educators project their own biases about a student's culture.

During the pandemic, there has been an important emphasis on social-emotional learning. The research supports how social-emotional learning positively impacts students and their success in schools (McCallops, et al., 2019; Bojorquez, 2021).

Counselors and teachers can work together to support students' mental health. They should work to incorporate instruction and school activities that use the lived experiences of their students and supports their cultural expression. It is even more powerful to include students' interests, views and needs into social-emotional learning programs designed for students the school serves (Kikeda, nd).

Being a culturally curious educator enables growth on both ends of the relationship. It helps you face pre-disposed judgments of others and keeps the space open and available for students to share their experiences and feelings with you as you support their mental health and learning.

Resources

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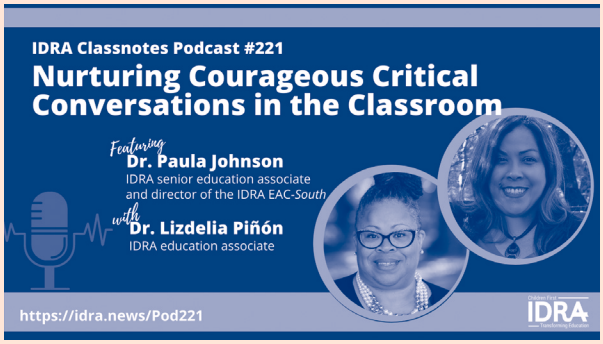
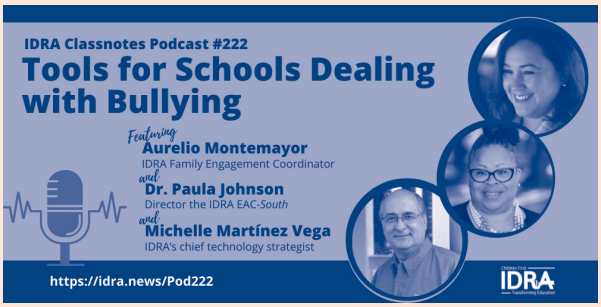
Focus: Culturally Sustaining Leadership

New Classnotes Podcast Episodes

Nurturing Courageous Critical Conversations in the Classroom – #221

Teachers understand the need for students to have substantive conversations to develop their vocabulary and connect to the subject matter. They build into their lesson plans specific strategies to generate critical thinking, dialogue and problem-solving. And when students want to talk about tough subjects, like social issues relevant to them, we cannot shut it down. Dr. Paula Johnson and Dr. Lizdelia Piñón discuss the importance of giving students think time, tools for communication and safe spaces to speak and be heard.





Tools for Schools Dealing with Bullying – #222

Bullying and harassment undermines students' abilities to learn and hinders the establishment of safe spaces in schools. The IDRA EAC-*South*'s *Interrupting Bullying & Harassment in Schools* online toolkit gives teachers and school leaders tools to prevent bullying and harassment by fostering a positive school climate. In this episode, Dr. Paula Johnson, Aurelio Montemayor, M.Ed., and Michelle Vega give an overview of the toolkit while discussing specific strategies from the perspective of teachers and a parent whose son was bullied.

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