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The High School in the Middle of Everywhere: Nebraska’s Lincoln High

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Criterion 9: Build on the Strengths of Language-Minority Students and Correctly Identify Their Needs

In 2002, world-renowned author Mary Pipher published a book about her home city, Lincoln, Nebraska, playfully titled *The Middle of Everywhere*, a tongue-in-cheek rejoinder to the idea that Nebraska is “the middle of nowhere.” But wordplay aside, her title was empirically apt, as her volume documented how immigration and refugee resettlement were demographically transforming Nebraska’s capital city. As in other cities, resettlement was concentrated in some areas of Lincoln, placing differential burdens on different parts of the community’s institutional infrastructure. Of interest to readers of this volume, Lincoln’s refugees and immigrants were concentrated in the city’s oldest high school. This account shares how that school embraced the challenge of demographic change by valuing the knowledge, skills, and experience of students and their families.

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CRITERION 9: Build on the Strengths of Language-Minority Students and Correctly Identify Their Needs

The [exemplary] school excels in approaching its bilingual students as emerging bilinguals, building on the language strengths they bring to school and engaging them equitably across their programs. The school has programs explicitly designed to serve EB students that is research based and implemented thoroughly. The school implements strategies that provide students with access to multi- or bilingual supports as needed in core content classes, supporting students at all levels of fluency.

Professional development is designed to equip teachers with the skills necessary to serve EB students, and there is meaningful communication between the school and EB families.

Founded in 1871 and in its current building since 1915, Lincoln High School (LHS), home of the Links, is the oldest public comprehensive high school in Lincoln, Nebraska, and the most centrally located. With marble stairs, detailed moldings, and stone columns, the school has the classic Greek temple appearance of many turn-of-the-20th-century urban high schools. Yet with students speaking 30 different first languages and claiming heritages from Africa, Southeast Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, and Europe, as well as Indigenous identities, the current enrollment is clearly a 21st-century demographic. It is currently one of six comprehensive high schools in fast-growing Lincoln Public Schools (LPS) and soon to be one of eight, with construction under way on a seventh and eighth comprehensive high school on the city's northwestern and southern edges.

Since the 1990s, Nebraska has allowed choice enrollment. That means, with few exceptions, that as long as there is space and a means for a student to get there, a student can choose to attend a public school outside their home catchment zone, even outside their home district. When the fifth and sixth comprehensive high schools (Lincoln North Star and Lincoln Southwest) opened in the early 2000s, LHS increasingly was pejoratively labeled the "Ghetto High School," a term that was profoundly problematic and consequential, but also in many ways what precipitated the transformations that

led to LHS's exemplary practices of today. This chapter primarily focuses on the ninth Schools of Opportunity criterion, which pertains to the importance of building on the strengths of students whose first language is other than English; in doing so, however, we place LHS's work in the context of other school practices that more broadly embrace and support the school's students. Framing that one element of LHS's practice in isolation would be misleading without a broader characterization of both the context and intended ethos of the whole school.

This chapter is coauthored by LHS's principal; by a former Spanish teacher and department chair who rejuvenated its lapsed Spanish as a Heritage Language course sequence before accepting a teacher education position in 2020 at the University of Nebraska at Kearney (UNK); and by a professor of education policy and practice at the nearby University of Nebraska–Lincoln (UNL). The remainder of the chapter is presented in nine parts:

- (I) Demographics and history of the building
- (II) Adding supports to address opportunity
- (III) Diversity, inequality, and the pandemic
- (IV) Heritage Language Program
- (V) English Language Program and Curriculum
- (VI) Cultural Ambassadors and Student Clubs
- (VII) Bilingual Liaisons
- (VIII) The Bilingual Career and Education Fair
- (IX) Final Thoughts

When we began crafting this chapter in 2019, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and the renewed Black Lives Matter mobilization that was precipitated by the racist killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and others, we did not anticipate crafting the third segment at all. But an account that excludes those factors would not only immediately feel dated, it would ignore how supporting students from various language backgrounds, as well as diverse cultural and racial backgrounds, has necessitated attending to these recent momentous events. Additionally, as one would both hope and expect, programs continue to be refined, adapted, and expanded, so the descriptions here reflect realities and goals circa January 2022,

when this chapter was finished. Segments II-VI below each describe building-specific efforts, while segment VII references districtwide programs that pertain to LHS. Segment VIII—about a new Language Career Fair—is saved for last because it describes a previously tiny initiative begun by the Latino Caucus (a student club) at Lincoln Southwest that LHS imported and was able to scale into an event that now operates districtwide.

I. Lincoln High's History and Demographics

For the first 55 years of its existence, LHS was the capital city's only high school. That changed in 1926 when the growing city annexed University Place, and the former University Place High School became Jackson High School, which later became part of the Northeast High School in 1941. Even as suburban development grew the population and pushed the city south and east, only slowly did LPS add new high schools—Lincoln Southeast in 1955 and Lincoln East in 1967. That status quo of four high schools held until the beginning of this century, when the city's fifth and sixth comprehensive high schools—Southwest and North Star—opened a year apart in 2002 and 2003. Those school openings combined with previous state legislation in the 1990s that permitted “public school choice” (enrollment outside of one's catchment zone) and a change in the 1970s in which the U.S. government identified Lincoln as a “refugee-friendly” city. Each had bearing on the challenges and opportunities LHS educators and students have negotiated over the last 20 years.

When Lincoln Public Schools (LPS) opened Southwest and North Star High Schools, enrollment at LHS predictably declined, but it declined more than it should have. Changing LHS from a 10-12-grade building to a 9-12-grade building (which happened at the same time) should have checked most of the decline, but Lincoln High went from 2,169 students as a three-grade school in 2000-2001; to 1,988 students in 2003-2004, the first year it had four grades; and after both new high schools had opened, to a low of 1,555 in 2006-2007. From *esprit de corps* and resources standpoints, a 25% decline was hard. For the next 4 years, the enrollment grew only very slightly; the 2011-12 student tally was just 1,571.

LHS faced a challenge: How could it reverse its demographic decline? Yet that question was not asked in isolation. As one of two (and now three) LPS high schools with a program for English learners, as one of two LPS high schools with a nursery and day-care facility for the children of teenage parents, and as the school with the catchment zone in the city's oldest and poorest neighborhoods, growing/rebuilding enrollment could not come at the expense of no longer meeting the needs of LHS's traditional populations. The task was to keep LHS attractive and responsive to its then-current enrollment while also making it an exciting environment for students from elsewhere in the city. The solution was to conceptualize its diversity as a resource. While that remains a work in progress (perhaps inevitably given that LHS cannot and should not isolate itself from national social dynamics of xenophobia, inequality, and racism), it is a struggle to be better that we hope others can learn from. Here, therefore, we attempt to explicate the structures, strategies, and real successes that mark progress in LHS's ongoing quest to be a School of Opportunity for all its constituents.

LHS's enrollment has grown, from 1,571 in 2011-2012 to 2,356 students in 2020-2021. Corresponding with that growth, the school has seen renewed interest from all groups that form its larger community. Also, more than a third of the school's enrollment chooses to come to LHS from other high schools' catchment zones. LHS also remains Lincoln Public School's only majority non-White high school, and it has the highest free and reduced-price lunch (FRL)-eligible student enrollment of any district high school. It is one of three high schools with an ESL program. And it is one of two with support facilities (e.g., day care) for teenage parents.

With over 30 languages other than English spoken by its students, LHS's strategy for assuring robust enrollment includes assuring strong supports for its students whose first language is other than English. Counting the number of identified English learners (ELs) is more fraught than counting race and ethnicity, because EL status can change when a student's mastery of English is recognized (see Hamann & Reeves, 2013). We can nonetheless see the growth in the percentage of ELs served at LHS following the low point in 2015-2016. In fact, the recent slippage in the percentage of ELs enrolled at LHS is mainly due to the denominator, the school's rising

total enrollments. Moreover, the school district's total EL population fell during this same period more dramatically, from 8.1 % to 7.1 %. So LHS enrolled a higher proportion of the district's identified ELs than it had previously.

As Catalano and Hamann (2016) have noted, Ruiz (1984) famously categorized approaches to language in schools as either “language as a problem,” “language as a right,” or “language as a resource.” There is a parallel terminology in the United States around teaching students whose first language is other than English. Most governmental bodies currently use “English learners” (ELs), which implies a deficit—that the students have a problem that schools need to remediate or address. The Schools of Opportunity project initially used the term “language-minority students,” which arises out of the idea that these students have—or should have—legally protected rights. The project now uses the term “emergent bilinguals” (or “emerging bilinguals”) to emphasize that these students are bringing an additional resource that schools can build upon and value.

We (the coauthors) of this chapter echo this sentiment and note that many LHS students should even be categorized as “emergent multilinguals” because they bring familiarity with more than language to LHS. Many African students (born in Africa or born to Africa-born parents) know a colonial language (e.g., French) and a religion-related language (e.g., Arabic), as well as Indigenous African languages (e.g., Swahili), while Guatemalan-origin students often have familiarity with an Indigenous language (e.g., K'iche') as well as the dominant colonial one (i.e., Spanish). Honoring this background knowledge describes practices and beliefs by many at LHS, yet reflecting district and state practice, the language development program for identified EBs continues to be called the ELL program. Referencing the School of Opportunity project stance, we use EB here when not referring to governmental policies or datasets, but when referring to students in the designated English acquisition programs. That allows us to distinguish EBs (those in the program) from the bigger, more heterogeneous category of LHS students with heritage language backgrounds whose cognition, learning habits, and cosmologies are all influenced by these additional linguistic capabilities.

II. Adding Supports to Address Opportunity

Being equitably responsive to LHS's recent enrollment has required supports for all students that may be more valuable for multilingual LHS students than for some of their peers. In 2016, LHS extended its media center hours into the evening. Though previously open until 5 P.M., through the help of grants and The Lighthouse, a nonprofit community organization whose goal is to provide middle and high school students with supports that will increase the probability of graduation, LHS was able to stay open until 8 P.M. Monday through Thursdays P.M. on Fridays, and from 8 to 11 A.M. on Saturdays. Keeping the space open for extended hours in the evenings has made it easier for low-income students to access the Internet and technology necessary for them complete their schoolwork and, additionally, to become more familiar with technology they may not have access to outside the school walls. Library staff have noted that parents appreciate having a safe place for students to stay after school while they are still at work. Hundreds of students have taken advantage of these extended hours in order to complete schoolwork, meet with other students for group projects, wait for parents or rides home, or pass time between after-school activities in a safe, stimulating environment.

During these extended library hours, tutors and school staff are available to students. Through this partnership, The Lighthouse provided volunteers who work with students, most of whom help students with schoolwork as well as applications for jobs, finding information about other programs or scholarships, receiving help with other work, and having access to resources they do not have at home. Teachers are also available to help with tutoring during this time, as are individuals who are working with students through other organizations like Upward Bound, Life After High School, and College Club. More recently, the after-school program was split into two parts: quiet hour studying and tutor opportunities in the library and a community-learning-center (CLC) partnership with Civic Nebraska that offers more than 30 after-school clubs.

LHS also supports students, including EBs, through its Academic Resource Center (ARC). This after-school support is curriculum-specific; ARC ensures that teachers for each curricular area are available Monday through Friday after school. Times are dependent on each

curricular area, but teachers can assign ARC to students or students can walk in to talk to and work with a teacher in the curricular area in which they need support. Finally, LHS offers a Saturday school. It is the only school in the district to offer weekend hours for students to work on and complete schoolwork. On Saturdays from 8 A.M. to 11 A.M., students who have fallen behind due to attendance issues, athletic or theater involvement, or other factors can work on missing and late work with the help of teachers and administrators.

III. Diversity, Inequality, and the Pandemic

Before looking more directly at strategies with/for EB students, it is worth pointing out that LHS has hardly been immune from the three pandemics that emerged in 2020—COVID-19, the economic contraction that came with the resulting shutdown, and the renewed racial justice awakening catalyzed by the brutal killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and others at the hands of police and vigilantes. Because of how broadly consequential these pandemics have been for schooling, they need to be accounted for if one is to claim (as we do) that LHS still embraces the practices and values that led to its recognition as a School of Opportunity. The senses of dislocation, worry, anger, exhaustion, and vulnerability (among others) that the pandemics precipitated have mattered for more than just EB students—indeed for more than just students. And the soul-searching, honest, community-oriented, and sometimes trepidatious responses have also mattered to more than just EB students. Having all students feel welcome, safe, and successful at LHS is more than an issue of particular pedagogical design and curricula for EL courses and heritage language education; it is also connected to the broader patterns of welcome and inclusion that are intended to encompass everyone in the building.

As with schools across the country, in March 2020 LHS closed to in-person instruction because of COVID and operated for the remainder of the 2019-2020 academic year remotely. As elsewhere, some students negotiated the transition nearly seamlessly, but for others it was much more of a challenge, as at-home access to the Internet was limited and/or expensive and/or they were needed for domestic labor

(like watching younger siblings who were also no longer in school). EB students were more likely to have these kinds of challenges than some of their student peers, but not all did. In turn, EB students were more likely to have their parents declared essential workers (who needed to stay on the job) in their employment, particularly in the food industry such as supermarkets and meatpacking.

Just after the school year ended, George Floyd was murdered in Minneapolis, and that precipitated a local reaction in Lincoln. Given youth mobilization for marches, this included students from all local high schools and from all backgrounds, but with the relatively intense response from Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) youth, involvement by LHS students may have been greater than from other schools since LHS has more BIPOC students. The Floyd murder was consequential for the LHS community even though school was no longer in session. We share an email below from the principal to LHS staff in early June 2020 (edited for length) that does two things: It depicts a specific effort to bring together any students and staff who wanted to process events through Zoom conversations, and it more generally illustrates the inclusive, communitarian, and transparent ways LHS leadership has tried to live out the goal of LHS serving as a welcoming resource and safe space:

To: "lhsstaff"

Sent: Tuesday, June 2, 2020 11:22:10 AM

Subject: Reflections and one next step-Lincoln High Community Connection Circle

Staff—

Since the death of George Floyd at the hands of a Minneapolis police officer, I have, I assume like many of you, struggled to find the words to articulate what I am thinking and feeling. The conversation around race, police brutality, and systemic racism has taken center stage in our country and in our city.

Over the last couple of days and nights I have seen the faces of the students we've committed to serve and they are sad, tired, and angry. But I've also been inspired by our current and former students' action and voice in this conversation. I have seen [student name] standing on the steps of the Capitol holding a sign that said "I Can't Breathe," practically alone before an organized protest happened. I have seen [another student name] kneeling in protest. I have

seen former students [four former students named] speak with passion and anger. I have seen kids like [three more names] attempt to speak and lead.

This is a tough time for us to not be in school. Many times in situations like these, our students depend on us to give them the time and space to process hard things. Some of our students have already reached out, searching not necessarily for answers, but just to talk and to process. They want to be seen, heard, and valued and many of them are used to getting that from us. I'm missing not being with our students and with you all because we see education as our way to make our world a better place, so in the midst of all of this mess, we feel kind of helpless.

I also have to admit that right now, I'm uncomfortable. I'm a White man at a school where I'm trying to educate young people who have experienced a very different life than me. And if I'm honest, the more I become aware of how much I don't understand, and the more I see the weight of how racism, injustice, and inequality has affected people different from me, the more uncomfortable I become. I worry about saying the wrong thing, I worry about responding the wrong way. I'm not sure I'm able to articulate all of my feelings and thoughts. But ultimately, that has to be okay. I have to learn to lean into that. Sometimes as educators we're used to having the answers and when we don't we're uneasy.

So I don't know if this is the right thing, or the best thing, but we're going to take a step tomorrow. Tomorrow afternoon we are going to invite students and staff to a *Lincoln High Community Connection Circle from 2pm-3pm via Zoom*. We'll be sending a call and an email to parents and students this afternoon with an invitation. In the interest of safety, students will fill out a Google Form to indicate their interest in being a part of the Connection/Restorative Circle and we'll send a Zoom link to their school email address closer to the meeting tomorrow afternoon. This will be an opportunity for us (students and staff) to begin to process all that we're experiencing We've worked with a few staff members and some students to help facilitate these circles, but we want to invite all of you to participate and be a part. *If this is something that you're interested in and available for, please indicate that on [hyper/ink] so that we know who to send the Zoom link to.* School isn't in session and most of us are not on contract, so there isn't pressure coming from me and this isn't a test measuring what kind of person you are. So if you're not ready, or the time simply doesn't work for you, that's okay. This needs to be the first of many steps we need to take as a community.

I love you all, miss you, and am proud to do this really important work alongside you. Mark

The principal also sent a shorter invitation than the one to staff to LHS families and students, which explained:

The recent events that have taken place in Minneapolis, as well as other cities in our country, have caused pain, anger, sadness, and confusion. We believe that our role as educators at Lincoln High is to not only educate our students, but to also love them, care for them, and provide a safe space and welcoming space for them to process their emotions. Tomorrow, at 2 p.m., we will be holding a Lincoln High Community Connection Circle, via Zoom, for our staff and students, focused on these events. While this is only a very small step in the work that needs to be done to bring justice and equality in our country, we hope it serves as a place for voices to be shared and heard ...

These Community Connection Circles helped set a tone of inclusion, seriousness, and purposeful listening. In early July, in another email to LHS staff, the principal observed (*italic text in the original*):

Our Community Conversation on June 3rd and other conversations with students and staff have caused me to reflect on my personal biases and my place within a system that has helped some students rise but has oppressed others.

I would guess that on some level all of us chose to work at Lincoln High because we view education as an act of social justice and our way to give back to our community and our world. I believe that because that common thread exists, it makes Lincoln High a great place to work. It's invigorating to work alongside people who see the work they do as more than just a job, but as a mission. But that doesn't mean we don't have work to do. I want to be vulnerable and apologize that sometimes I think because I work at Lincoln High, where we have so much diversity, that it somehow by osmosis makes me culturally competent. Being around students and others who are different from me has caused me to learn a lot over my time at LHS, but this summer has made me realize that it's not enough.

... Over the last month, I've begun meeting with a group of staff members to plan our learning and goals and I'm really excited about this work. I'm going to outline a few next steps that we'll be asking teachers to take leading up to August to prepare us for this work, but

first I want to clearly communicate a few things:

- At Lincoln High, Black Lives Matter
- This work won't be something that is here today and gone tomorrow. We are committing to this work for the long haul.
- This work and these conversations may make you feel uncomfortable ... we're going to move forward. We all chose to work here and with our students, and talking about race, injustice, and our own personal biases needs to be part of the gig, but especially at Lincoln High. I hope you choose to continue on this journey with us.

Our 'Staff Committee that I've been meeting with has laid out a statement as a goal for this work. It's heavy and aspirational, but I want you to read it and commit to being a part of it:

To build awareness, understanding, and to challenge individual, collective, and systemic racism present at LHS. To require teachers to actionably improve daily classroom practice to create equitable opportunities and outcomes-with student supports-for all students. To change policies and systems that create inequities within our school.

We believe that this is in alignment with our school mission statement:

Lincoln High School is committed to preparing each student to use multiple perspectives and individual talents to live, learn, and work in a diverse society . . .

The long email then finished with a segment called "Next Steps" that included a survey link for staff to indicate professional development desires and that shared links to two articles, one an op-ed by Kareem Abdul-Jabbar reflecting on the death of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter movement, the other a piece that considered the many ways racism can exist and be consequential at schools. The email ended with a request that staff think about how they had witnessed or experienced racism at LHS, whether intentional or unintentional, and an invitation to think about how their work was or could be antiracist.

A month later, staff came back together for several professional development days before the 2020-2021 academic year launched. Those meetings referenced the work of the summer, included the needed optimism that usually characterizes coming back to start a new year

(albeit with the social distancing expectations and only half of the enrollment physically in the building at a time on alternating days), and then included a tough examination of inequities by race, gender, FRL status, and EL status and enrollment in honors-level courses. A review of the honors course enrollment was followed by a review, with a similar demographic breakdown, of course failure rates. Opposite of the honors course data, this lens showed that American Indian, Black, Hispanic, Two or More Races, English learners, and FRL-eligible students all had above-average course failure rates. Reflective of the above emails, staff considered three key points: (1) LHS is a great place, with most students feeling welcomed; (2) LHS staff have chosen to work at the school because they see education as a form of social justice; and (3) school data nonetheless show that staff make decisions and operate within a system that advantages some students and disadvantages others, so the school must work to change this. From this arose two commitments from the school's teachers:

1. They would be ready to acknowledge that students would return to school changed because of recent events and personal experiences with racism and would need encouragement to use their words and confidence to articulate it.
2. They would embark on a collaborative journey to better understand and respond to students.

Staff subsequently committed to ongoing group book study as part of their professional learning as well as monthly equity-focused discussions in small-group faculty meetings. Topics included how to have hard conversations about race with students, how to increase diversity in the curriculum, and how to identify inequities in teachers' own classrooms.

These 2020-2021 academic year themes illuminate that even though LHS had been honored to be recognized as a School of Opportunity (before the three pandemics), building staff and leaders insisted that there remained much work to do. This recent activity also helps contextualize how the school's commitments to better support EB and other multilingual students was part of its broader consideration of advantage and disadvantaged through acts of commission and omission.

IV. Heritage Language Program

A key mechanism to reducing disparities is to recognize and build on the assets (what Norma Gonzalez et al. [2005] and others have called “funds of knowledge”) that students bring with them to school. In 2014 Dr. Janet Eckerson helped to create LHS’s and LPS’s Spanish for Heritage Learners (SHL) coursework, after moving to the district from Crete Public Schools, a school district serving a nearby meatpacking community where approximately 50% of students are of Latinx backgrounds. In Crete she had launched one of Nebraska’s first SHL programs at a time when they were so unusual that she wrote her dissertation in part about helping different SHL teachers in different schools and districts find one another to compare notes on how they were trying to support students with prior familial and community backgrounds with Spanish (Eckerson, 2015).

SHL programs acknowledge that students with some background in Spanish but little or no formal academic experience with it bring a different profile to the *Spanish as a world language* classroom than do their peers who encounter Spanish as a foreign language. In the sequence that Dr. Eckerson led through the beginning of the COVID pandemic, which enrolls many former EBs and even a few still-identified EBs, heritage learners study Spanish with an emphasis on building upon what they know and reconciling it with the academic Spanish encountered in world language programs and the Advanced Placement (AP) test.

“Correcting” the Spanish of a Spanish speaker is, at minimum, a fraught exercise and prospectively comes intertwined with issues of judging dialects as inferior or superior to each other and upsetting a student’s sense of identity (Flores & Rosa, 2015). A premise of SHL classes is to avoid these hazards by, among other things, engaging students in consideration of the multiple “Spanishes” spoken around the world and encountered in Lincoln. The program at LHS was run by co-author Dr. Eckerson (a classroom teacher), who has worked with the Nebraska Department of Education and LPS leaders to create professional development support for teachers of this specialized topic area. Like the *Cultural Ambassadors* described later, the SHLs program sees students’ first language as an asset.

While Spanish is not the first language of all of LHS's current and former ELs, it is the only world language taught in Lincoln Public Schools for which there is a significant heritage learner enrollment. There are large Karen-, Arabic-, and Vietnamese-speaking populations at LHS, but those languages are not taught as world languages in LPS, so creating a heritage language (HL) class for them would be much more complicated. There is also a modest French-as-first-language-speaking population at LHS, mainly composed of students from Francophone African backgrounds, but their numbers are small enough that a French for HLs strand has not yet been attempted. LHS has also been working with the district, state, and university to explore the prospect of Arabic as both a world and heritage language, but as of this writing those have not advanced beyond conversations.

V. English Language Program and Curriculum

While recognizing and building on heritage languages is important work, that mainly describes a different portion of LHS's practice and a different student population than the school's efforts directed at identified EBs. Regarding the latter, LHS hosts the district's largest English as a Second Language (ESL) program at the secondary level. Students in this program are placed in one of five levels based on proficiency, with 1 indicating very limited facility in English, and levels 2,3, and 4 describing increased English proficiency (and more mainstreaming for elective and academic coursework). In turn, level 5 references those who have exited any extra language support but who have not passed the English language proficiency assessment (ELPA). While the ELPA is technically required for a student to no longer be classified as an EL, it is not a gateway to anything and does not block students from earning credits toward graduation.¹ Level 5s are taking an entirely non-ESL load but the ELL Department continues to track their success, which means their progress is more closely monitored than if they formally exited.

1. Rather than the ELPA, the typical test emphasis for advanced EBs is actually the ACT, which students can take for free, and that does double duty by aiding prospective college admission.

Students at Level I spend multiple hours a day in ESL classes, with their limited forays beyond either in electives (like PE) or in content coursework (like mathematics) where all of their classmates are also identified EBs. Content teaching at this level has included some co-teaching and more co-teaching remains a department goal, but in the most recent semester (fall 2021) new enrollments of identified EBs forced pulling ELL teachers who were co-teaching in content classrooms back to meet the increased demand for the ESL classes. At level 2, identified EBs begin taking social studies and science courses that can count toward graduation. At levels 3 and 4, identified EBs continue to take one ESL course, but also begin enrolling in language arts classes that count toward graduation. For the EBs with the least developed English skills (i.e., levels 1 and 2), content coursework tends to be with fully identified EB enrollments, allowing content-area teachers to adapt coursework for an ELL enrollment and clarifying to ELL teachers which colleagues and which classes need additional support. For EBs who also are identified for special education, supports from the Special Education program are also leveraged.

One goal is for EL classrooms to feel like a safe space for participating students, but not a separate one. This explains the ELL Department's continued monitoring of EBs even as more/most of their coursework occurs outside of the department. From another perspective, it also explains why the ESL classrooms are located near the cafeteria in a high-volume part of the school (rather than some distant corner).

Given the broad needs and aspirations of its various constituencies, LHS also must be plurally involved with the community. LHS has a full-time parent and community engagement specialist who has both direct and coordinating roles, and the school convenes an EB parent advisory committee. Until recently, this role was complemented by a second position, an EB student advocate, who did an impressive job as a kind of "counselor lite" to EBs, becoming their first stop for academic support, legal support, and/or mental health support. The academic support included regular monitoring of all identified EBs' grades and intervention with both the student and usually the teacher when an EB was not passing a class. The legal support references when a student or family member need assistance with visas, legal papers, and other documentation that newcomer families regularly

need to negotiate and that can be profound distractions for students if not dealt with. The advocate was not a provider of such services, but rather an intermediary connecting an EB to community and advocacy resources where they could find help. Similarly, the advocate was not a provider of mental health services but was often an intermediary connecting an EB in need to counseling support.

When that EB student advocate left LHS, the ELL Department divided the role among its teachers and designated advocates by proficiency level. (That meant a review of all level 1 EBs by a teacher, a review of all level 2 students' grades by a different teacher, and so on.) Mostly these teachers do not take on the multiple advocacy roles directly, except partially the academic one, but, like the former student advocate, they are prepared to support EB students by connecting them to the right resources. More generally, the smaller scale of the ELL Department means EBs are known and advocated for as they make forays into the rest of the school. This helps even level 5s who are no longer taking any designated coursework but whom ELL Department personnel continue to monitor.

ELL faculty often also help students get ready to pass the English reading proficiency test used by Southeast Community College, which, if passed, takes away a key obstacle to students qualifying for a Learn to Dream scholarship that fully funds pursuit of an associate degree. Alignment with Southeast Community College also matters in a second way. Many EBs at the high school level arrive with interrupted schooling and often are older. The Nebraska state constitution allows enrollment in high school up to age 21 for residents who have not yet finished high school. This means some EBs will "time out" before they can earn a high school diploma and that students will need to pursue a GED. While earning a GED is literally a process of taking and passing a multifaceted test, Southeast Community College (like other Nebraska community colleges) offers GED test prep, which includes both content and logistical support for the exam. In this scenario, ELL Department faculty work with EBs to have their high school ESL classes set up students to continue with GED prep at community college.

Expectations to position graduates for further academic success broadly describes a pervasive norm at LHS and does not mean EBs are only expected to be ready for community college. EBs are also supported in planning for 4-year degrees and institutions. One of

the most generous scholarships available for public higher education in Nebraska is called the Susie Buffett Scholarship. Typically, identified EBs earn a fifth to a third of all these scholarships that LHS graduates obtain each year. In 2021, a total of 23 LHS graduates earned Susie Buffett Scholarships and EBs earned 7 of those; in 2020, they won 4 of 24; in 2019, they received 8 of 23; and in 2017, they earned 4 of 15.

While the ELL Department takes the lead on assuring that EBs are adequately supported, consistent with Miramontes et al. (2011), support of EBs is not seen as ELL faculty task only. Equitable inclusion of identified EBs and equitable and meaningful parent and community engagement are products of attitude and the culture that school leaders are seeking to build. During job interviews, educators and classified staff alike are asked about their attitudes toward cultural and linguistic diversity. Only candidates who explain that they see home language(s) and cultural background as assets are offered positions.

VI. Cultural Ambassadors and Student Clubs

As another example of seeing students' bi/multilingualism as an asset, LHS runs a program called Cultural Ambassadors. Students in this group serve as multilingual liaisons to help parents and other visitors with limited English negotiate the school when there are public events. Students are not interpreters for high-stakes and private communication (about an IEP, for example); the school district relies on paid community liaisons for that. Rather, the ambassadors help parents and visitors find out where to go to get from point A to point B and otherwise negotiate the school. While occasionally ambassadors are native English speakers who have developed advanced skills in another language, most of the ambassadors act as interpreters between English and their native languages, among them Arabic, Karen, Kurdish, Russian, and Spanish. While too often first language skills are seen as obstacles or irrelevant by American public schools, here the orientation is intentionally quite the opposite. LHS wants language skills to be visible, helpful, and a point of pride.

This orientation also fits for several of the 42 student clubs that students can join. One day a month is Club Day, and on that day students

can miss up to two classes to participate in one or two of the 42 clubs (all of which have faculty or staff sponsors). The themes of the clubs vary, as is implied by titles like Feminists for Change, Cribbage Club, and HOSA (for future health professionals), with several having explicit culture, identity, and language tie-ins. For example, the Joven Noble Latino Leaders Club, operated in partnership with a local Hispanic-serving community organization, targets Latino male students and encourages them to pursue their academic and life goals through interactions with successful male role models and community interactions. Another club, Las Razas Unidas, helps students become involved in LHS activities and does so by affirming Latino/a/x heritage (using both Spanish and English for its formal description of its purpose). Guest speakers, fundraising, and a variety of options encourage students to engage in school and community activities. Another club, the Karen/Zomi/Karenni Club, supports students from Burma and Thailand as they explore the American culture and education system while celebrating the Karen traditions.

Through clubs such as these, LHS endeavors to help all students find multiple and various points to engage and connect. Clubs that affirm backgrounds, identities, and languages and that give means for social connection through service learning or various group activities can be particularly helpful for their welcoming of EB students.

VII. Bilingual Liaisons

Starting in 2016, LHS teachers and staff have participated in a professional development workshop on how to effectively call students' homes. In many instances those calls (and written communication) need to be in languages other than English, and LHS staff work closely with district-level liaisons for the seven largest language groups in the district (Spanish, Karen, Kurdish, Vietnamese, Arabic, Ukrainian, and Russian). Several of the district's 24 liaisons, however, are multilingual (despite the colloquial label describing their job as "bilingual"). That means that in addition to the "main seven," the district had interpretive capacity in six more languages, among them Farsi and Kurmanji (the language spoken by Yazidis, an ethnic group from Iraq).

The district coordinator of the liaison program has lauded its impact, noting its close work with LHS where some of the liaisons spend the majority of their time. He also noted the increase in permanent funding (versus grant-dependent) for liaison positions. The district is still seeking to expand capacity to support Central American Indigenous languages, since an increasing number of students and families from Guatemala have made their way to LPS and LHS. While the bilingual liaisons and a related districtwide Welcome Center are not, strictly speaking, LHS programs, they do have a substantial impact on LHS and the school's commitments to welcome, support, and include EB students and their families.

VIII. Bilingual Career and Education Fair

The LPS Bilingual Career and Education Fair, now in its 6th year at Lincoln High, brings employers, educational institutions, government, and community organizations together to showcase for students and families the 174 Schools of Opportunity opportunities available in Lincoln and across the state for multilingual students. From scholarship opportunities to on-the-spot interviews, the fair connects language-minority students and their families with recruiters and representatives of community institutions that value multilingualism. The event, hosted annually in LHS's cafeteria, now boasts dozens of diverse exhibitors and is visited by hundreds of students and parents from across the city.

To create the fair, teachers involved in the district SHL professional learning community (PLC) seized upon an idea that began in a Latino student club at Lincoln Southwest High School in 2014. The group hosted a small event in which a handful of Latinx professionals talked with students about their careers and the opportunities for Spanish/English bilinguals in their fields. The SHL PLC, then led by Dr. Eckerson, reimagined the event as an opportunity for students in the SHL level 1 courses across the district to use skills they were learning in class to help plan the fair, from writing professional emails to creating promotional materials. LHS was the obvious choice to host the district-level event, with its large multilingual student population, central urban location, and supportive administration.

In the fall of 2015, LHS hosted the first annual LPS Bilingual Career and Education Fair, or *Feria de Educación y Carreras Bilingües* – focusing, at first, on Spanish/English bilinguals. The event exploded and in subsequent years expanded to target multilingual speakers of many other community languages, as well as second language learners of world languages, within LPS. It is now attended by a diverse cross-section of Lincoln’s population, mainly but not exclusively LPS students. Students in SHL courses still participate in organizing the event and inviting and thanking the presenters. In fact, the fair is so successful in bringing parents of minority language students to the building that LHS counselors began to offer other services, like college financial planning presentations, in conjunction with the fair.

IX. Final Thoughts

As the city’s oldest high school and with a current physical plant that includes portions of the school that are over 100 years old, Lincoln High also explicitly if modestly attends to its ties to generations of alumni/ae. In the main hallway outside the Ted Sorensen Theatre (named for President John F. Kennedy’s speechwriter, who was an LHS alum), there is a wall of fame with portraits of 100 distinguished alumni, including (in addition to Sorensen) former talk show host Dick Cavett and former Lincoln Public Schools Director of Multicultural Education Dr. Thomas Christie (among many others). Past generations can enter the school and still see familiar hallways and even familiar faces on the wall. Lincoln High takes seriously its century-plus role of being a beacon and anchor of the community. That community now speaks The High School in the Middle of Everywhere 175 multiple languages and represents most of the globe in terms of ethnic origin, and it too finds welcome and embrace at LHS.

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