



## THREE WAYS TO EMPHASIZE EQUITY DURING SCHOOL CLOSURES



As the coronavirus hit the world this spring, the nation's dual language bilingual education (DLBE) programs were in the midst of a transformation. This model for producing graduates fluent in two or more languages, with the mission of treating emerging bilingualism as an asset rather than a deficit, was once limited to localized efforts. But it has expanded in recent years to include more top-down district and state initiatives, according to a book published last month by Multilingual Matters, titled *Dual Language Bilingual Education: Teacher Cases and Perspectives on Large-Scale Implementation*, and authored by Kathryn I. Henderson, associate professor at the University of Texas at San Antonio and NEPC Fellow Deborah Palmer, professor at the University of Colorado Boulder.

In a [recent blog post](#), Henderson and Palmer reflect on their research in light of the shift to online schooling prompted by the pandemic. Their research into DLBE program implementation gives them some interesting insights about the need to be deliberate about equity because, as they explain in their journal article, the growth of the dual-language model has been accompanied by its own equity struggle. As the model grows, it has become [increasingly popular](#) with white, middle-class, native English-speaking families with the resources to crowd out lower-income, non-English-speaking students of color.

Below are three suggestions from Henderson and Palmer for maintaining equity. Although they focus on DLBE programs, these suggestions readily apply to educators struggling with inequities of all kinds during school closures—especially those who work with families of varying income levels and backgrounds.

- 1. Ensure equitable access.** One lesson learned over the past several months is that

online learning is highly problematic. But when schools start up in the fall, hybrid approaches will likely be necessary. With learning moving online, additional issues of access have arisen, Henderson and Palmer write. For example, children need reliable home internet to equitably access instruction. Yet in households with children, 35% of those earning under \$30,000 annually lack high-speed home internet as compared to 6% of those earning \$75,000 or more a year, according to the [Pew Research Center](#). In addition, affluent parents are [more likely](#) to have jobs that permit them to work from home. As [NEPC Fellow Janelle Scott](#), a professor at the University of California, Berkeley [told \*Education Week\*](#) last month, “higher-income families are going to be much better positioned to support [remote] learning than less-resourced families who don’t have the privilege of staying at home.” Henderson and Palmer suggest that educators ask themselves, *Do the students I’m struggling to reach during closures have the technology and support they need, and have the required resources been provided to them in languages that their families understand?*

- 2. Center marginalized students.** As DLBE programs have “whitened” or “gentrified,” the students the programs were originally designed to serve—those from low-income families and of color or immigrants—have sometimes been marginalized. With schools closed, Henderson and Palmer urge dual language educators, now more than ever before, to pour energy into prioritizing the educational needs and the basic human needs and rights of these families. For example, educators can use their knowledge of children’s family situations (e.g., lost jobs, lack of access government assistance) to share necessary resources.
- 3. Engage in a critically conscious curriculum.** Although the pandemic has been challenging for almost everyone, some families are struggling far more than others. Consider this an opportunity to develop cross-cultural understanding and empathy within a school community as well as raise consciousness about uneven access to food, shelter, safety, and healthcare alongside school materials, Internet access, and electronic devices. “Teachers are critical language-in-education policymakers who can engage in transformative pedagogy through centering the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse children and their families and adopting critical consciousness as a central goal,” they write. “We believe more strongly than ever that this is a time to (re)invest and (re)commit to this transformative potential of DLBE. Hang in there, bi/multilingual maestr@s!”

## NEPC Resources on Equity and Social Justice

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