4-14-2023

Considering the Social-Emotional Well-Being of Multilingual Learners: A Comparative Case Study Across Program Models

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CONSIDERING THE SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING OF MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS

A Comparative Case Study across Program Models

ABSTRACT

This multiple-case study probes the social-emotional well-being of elementary and middle-grade students labeled as English learners who were enrolled in different bilingual program models in the midwestern United States. Using ecological systems theory, this qualitative study probes students' social-emotional well-being across schools and within different bilingual program models, seeking to determine the structures and practices that nurture positive facets or perpetuate negative facets of student well-being. Findings indicate that interactions with peers and adults in schools influence students' social-emotional well-being, with program-model variations, community demographics, and societal discourse shaping these in-school experiences, relationships, and sentiments. Implications center on critical consideration of bilingual program-model implementation to prepare teachers, promote schoolwide integration, prioritize home languages, and nurture inclusive communities.

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GLOBALIZATION and immigration have changed the composition of schools across the world. In the United States, 22% of residents speak languages other than English, which includes children who speak a collective 400 languages (NCES, 2019). Whereas some students enter school with proficiency in English and home languages, students labeled as *English learners* (ELs) continue to develop proficiency in English-medium listening, speaking, reading, and writing. More than 5 million students in US public schools are considered ELs, comprising 10% of the total student population (NCES, 2019). Given that children often begin their path of developing English when they start school, the majority of ELs (83%) attend US elementary schools (NCES, 2019). Dominant discourse often centers on so-called achievement gaps, with English-medium test scores used to compare academic abilities of ELs with English-proficient peers (Fry, 2008). Despite consistent attention to academics, previous research indicates that ELs' academic achievement correlates with social-emotional well-being (Niehaus et al., 2017). This study focuses on the social-emotional well-being of *multilingual learners* (MLLs) in schools. We use the term MLLs in place of ELs to disrupt institutional emphasis on English and accentuate students' competencies in multiple languages.

With changes and challenges emergent from the COVID-19 pandemic in our schools and society, the need to prioritize wellness has never been stronger. We want and need children to be well—physically, psychologically, socially, collectively, and spiritually (Harrell, 2015). Well-being emerges as an integral component of wellness, including social well-being nurtured by positive relationships, connectedness, and collective trust among individuals and the emergent emotions from those interactions and experiences (e.g., happiness, sadness, anger; Harrell, 2018). Social-emotional well-being influences how individuals function, maneuver, and recover from experiences in daily life (Denham et al., 2009). In K–8 schools, stakeholders often approach social-emotional learning (SEL) through prescribed curricula targeting universal competencies, rather than embracing and developing well-being as complex, dynamic, and relational among racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse students (Hecht & Shin, 2015).

Previous research supports our understandings of the complexities of MLLs' social-emotional well-being. Largely focused on newcomer and adolescent MLLs, prior studies indicate (*a*) conflicts between home and dominant cultures, (*b*) sadness and preoccupation with losses amid immigration, (*c*) pressure to learn the dominant language, (*d*) intergenerational struggles, and (*e*) opposition in response to discrimination and exclusion (Harklau & Moreno, 2019; Juang et al., 2018; Rishel & Miller, 2017). Whereas these studies emphasize negative influences on well-being, other scholars have sought to determine variables that influence MLLs' well-being as positive or negative. For example, research indicates that lower English proficiency interferes with adjustment and social success (Kang et al., 2014) whereas bilingualism enhances self-control and SEL skills (Han, 2010). Adding an important lens on what mediates MLLs' positive well-being, Suárez-Orozco and colleagues (2018) have found the importance of maintaining home language and practices while adopting those of the dominant culture.

In addition to probing factors influencing well-being outside of schools, scholars have investigated how MLLs' experiences in schools come into play. Home language has emerged as an important mediator of relationships, as evidenced with young

MLLs' interactions with teachers (Chang et al., 2007) and peers (Halle et al., 2014). When children do not share a home language, they can still forge positive social relationships with purposeful integration and systemic social supports, as evidenced by a study of five successful middle school MLLs in content-area classrooms (Baker, 2017). Teachers play an integral role in providing social and emotional supports, which requires pushing past deficit-based mindsets (Cho et al., 2019). This literature provides an important starting place to understand how schools influence MLLs' well-being; however, these studies focus on singular settings with targeted age groups (e.g., early childhood, middle school), which begs a comparative lens across schools and K–8 learners.

Program model surfaces as a pertinent lens in this discussion. Variance in state policy and school demographics result in programs for MLLs that fall into two categories: *subtractive* programs that prioritize English proficiency and *additive* programs that develop biliteracy in English and home languages (García & Kleifgen, 2018). Examples of subtractive programs include English as a Second Language (ESL), where students receive English support from a designated teacher, and transitional bilingual education (TBE) where students begin learning in their home language and make the transition into English over time. Additive programs, often referred to as dual-language programs, include one- and two-way immersion (TWI). One-way immersion programs enroll MLLs, whereas two-way merges MLLs and non-MLLs from both language backgrounds (e.g., 50% English, 50% Spanish). When implemented in local elementary schools, variations in program models emerge, including program size and duration, allocation and frequency of language use, and integration between MLLs and non-MLLs.

Various comparative studies have explored how program models influence language development and academic achievement (Estrada et al., 2019; Thomas & Collier, 2002; Umansky & Reardon, 2014). But what do we know about students' well-being across programs? A handful of studies have explored how program models influence well-being. Research probing high school students' perceptions of dual-language programming indicates positive influences on Latinx students' ethnic identity development (Bearse & de Jong, 2008) and friendships between MLLs and non-MLLs (Kibler et al., 2014). Research on secondary ESL contexts demonstrates challenges in social relationships with non-MLL peers, such as Chinese immigrant students in self-contained, high school ESL classes feeling excluded (Li, 2010) and middle school Latinx MLLs feeling anxious when integrated with non-MLLs in general-education classes (Pappamihiel, 2002). These studies provide insight into how program models may influence well-being, such as language prioritization and integration with peers. Nonetheless, they focus on secondary settings without points of comparison across programs or students.

This research seeks to understand how elementary schools and programs influence MLLs' social-emotional well-being. With this multiple-case study involving five K–8 schools in north suburban Chicago, we explore the well-being of diverse MLLs enrolled in different program models, including ESL, TBE, and TWI. Two research questions (RQ1 and RQ2) guide this study: What influences MLLs' social-emotional well-being in school? In what ways do structures and practices related to program model influence MLLs' social-emotional well-being?

Framework

We use ecological systems theory (Bronfrenbrenner, 1981, 1994) paired with person-environment-culture emergence theory (Harrell, 2015, 2018). Bronfrenbrenner conceptualizes the environment as integral in shaping human development, including social and cultural factors' influence on a person's daily realities and experiences. Harrell extends this framework by prioritizing culture to understand interactions between person and environment, resulting in a culturally inclusive framework to probe well-being. Taken together, these orientations facilitate investigation of ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse children's well-being as influenced by experiences in schools, homes, communities, and society.

Ecological systems theory centers on the *microsystem*, the daily realities occurring within one's immediate surroundings, and recognizes the influence of the larger ecological environment (see Fig. 1; Bronfrenbrenner, 1981). Bronfrenbrenner describes the microsystem as a "pattern of activities, social roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given face-to-face setting" (Bronfrenbrenner, 1994, p. 5). Children participate in various microsystems, including homes, schools, and peer groups. In this study, we focus on the school microsystem, including experiences and interactions between children, educators, and peers. Bronfrenbrenner describes schools as integral spaces to explore from an ecological perspective, as they are "the only setting that serves as a comprehensive context for human development from the early years onward" (Bronfrenbrenner, 1981, p. 132) outside of the family home.
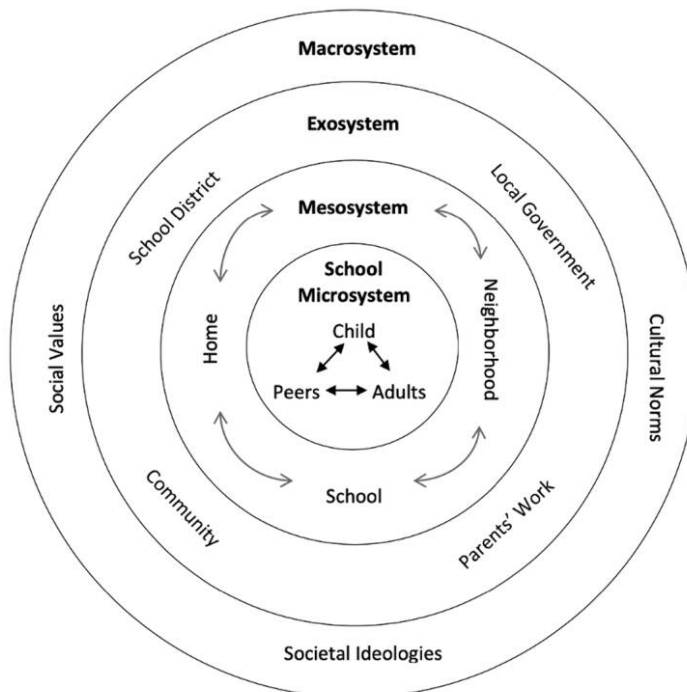

Figure 1. Illustration of ecological systems theory when used to understand the microsystem of a school. Modified from Bronfrenbrenner (1981).

Nested around the microsystem are other human systems that influence daily life, including mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem (Bronfrenbrenner, 1981). The *mesosystem* is a network of microsystems, calling attention to the connections between schools with students' homes and families. But the ecological environment extends beyond an individual's immediate circumstances or experiences. The *exosystem* factors in the indirect effects of remote settings or institutions, such as communities, local governments, and school districts, as well as parents' workplaces and social networks. The *macrosystem* considers larger ideologies and social values that predominate in society, as well as cultural norms and beliefs within communities (Bronfrenbrenner, 1981). These ecological systems allow us to probe students' school-based experiences and well-being as shaped by interactions in homes, communities, and society.

Person-environment-culture emergence theory (Harrell, 2015) extends Bronfrenbrenner's theory to study the intersection of the ecological environment with psychobiological and multicultural processes. Immigration and globalization have changed our world, prompting daily interactions among people from different backgrounds, identities, and experiences. These complex and dynamic interactions reflect the "multiple macro- and micro-cultural contexts which intersect and interact in unique ways" (Harrell, 2015, p. 20). Situated in the field of positive psychology, this framework conceptualizes these interactions and relationships through an asset-based lens, embracing the strengths and resources of communities and cultures that have been traditionally marginalized in schools and society.

Within interactions among person, environment, and culture, well-being emerges as an integral construct. Harrell (2018) conceptualizes well-being as collective, seeing individuals' lives and experiences as interconnected. Shifting away from individualistic conceptualizations common among White, Western scholars, her explicit focus on ethnically diverse populations sees well-being as multidimensional, spanning collective, physical, psychological, social, and transcendent contexts (Harrell, 2015). Relationships emerge as integral to understanding well-being, including inter- and intragroup relationships and dialogue, as well as emergent social identities embedded in community and societal change (Harrell, 2018). By exploring the perspectives and experiences of students and teachers—both individual and collective—we can understand the similarities and differences in well-being emergent from interactions and relationships in classrooms, schools, communities, and society.

Method

We used a qualitative, multiple-case study design (Merriam, 1998) with purposive selection of five K–8 schools with distinct program models that serve MLLs. The qualitative approach yielded nuanced data on participants' perspectives and experiences in schools, allowing the research team to probe the development of well-being through interactions and relationships situated in the unique social and cultural environment of each school (Bronfrenbrenner, 1981; Harrell, 2018). By studying five bounded cases, each with unique populations and programs serving MLLs, we gathered substantive data to explore MLLs' well-being in schools (RQ1) and how structures and practices related to program model might influence that well-being (RQ2).

Context

Situated in the midwestern United States, Illinois ranks fifth in the nation for number of MLLs with 217,790 enrolled in public schools, comprising 11.3% of students (NCES, 2019). State policy requires schools with 20 or more MLLs of the same language background to use TBE, where bilingual-endorsed teachers provide instruction in English and the home language (Section 105 ILSC 5/14C-3). Schools have the option of going beyond TBE to enact dual-language programs, such as TWI. In contexts where 19 or fewer MLLs share the same language, schools use transitional programs of instruction, typically ESL supports via collaboration with general-education teachers or in self-contained classrooms (Illinois State Board of Education, 2019).

The five participating Chicago-area schools implemented different program models to match community demographics (see Table 1). With more than 20 MLLs from Spanish-speaking homes, Dunlap designated one classroom per grade level as TBE, where MLLs received support from a bilingual-endorsed teacher; ESL resource teachers pushed into general-education classrooms to support students from other language backgrounds. Two schools used TWI programs in Spanish and English: Excelencia enacted TWI in every classroom spanning K–5, whereas Honore had a single strand with one TWI classroom per grade level. At the two schools with linguistically diverse populations, stakeholders used ESL as the hallmark program, including a push-in model with collaboration between ESL and general-education teachers at Acadia and a self-contained ESL class period at Middle.

Participants

We worked with district and school administrators to connect with educators working with MLLs in third through eighth grades. We sought consent to participate

Table 1. Focal Schools

Pseudonym	Program Details	Demographics
Acadia	Kindergarten–grade 5 720 students; 33% EL ESL resource, push in	32% White, 3% Black, 16% Latinx, 46% Asian, 3% Multiracial 18% low income
Dunlap	Kindergarten–grade 5 560 students; 28% EL Transitional bilingual Single strand	50% White, 2% Black, 27% Latinx, 17% Asian, 4% Multiracial 28% low income
Excelencia	Kindergarten–grade 5 410 students; 50% EL Two-way immersion (50/50) Whole school	31% White, 64% Latinx, 2% Asian, 3% Multiracial 52% low income
Honore	Kindergarten–grade 5 500 students; 17% EL Two-way immersion (90/10) Single strand	58% White, 8% Black, 23% Latinx, 2% Asian, 9% Multiracial 25% low income
Middle	Grades 6–8 690 students; 8% EL ESL resource, pull out	47% White, 2% Black, 25% Latinx, 19% Asian, 7% Multiracial 29% low income

Note.—EL = English learners; ESL = English as a Second Language.

from teachers who indicated interest following an initial recruitment email. Overall, 26 educators participated across five schools, including bilingual, ESL, general-education, and special-area teachers, as well as social workers, specialists, and leaders (see Table 2). Educators varied in experience: 4 in the early years of their profession, 6 with less than 10 years in schools, and 16 with more than 10 years of experience. Aside from the White male administrator at Honore, educators identified as female, including 17 White women and 8 Latinas. All Latina participants worked in TWI programs, whereas all participants in ESL and TBE programs were White.

We then coordinated efforts to recruit students labeled as ELs. We maintained focus on third through eighth grades, recognizing that older students could reflect upon well-being and supports in classrooms, programs, and schools. Teachers sent home recruitment materials to all students fitting the criteria. After students returned parental consent forms, we sought assent to participate in focus groups. Across the 5 schools, 70 students spanning third through seventh grades participated (see Table 2). Approximately 55% of participants identified as male and 45% as female. About 60% used Spanish at home with the remaining 40% noting use of other languages including Arabic, Hindi, Lithuanian, Portuguese, Russian, Ukrainian, and Urdu.

Data Collection

We used qualitative methods to capture the perspectives and experiences of participants via interviews and focus groups (Merriam, 1998). We offered educators options for interviews or focus groups depending on preference and availability. The primary researchers (first and second authors) facilitated all interviews and focus groups on-site at the school during educators' lunch breaks, as well as before and after school. We conducted 5 focus groups and 9 interviews with educators for a total of 487 minutes with average of 35 minutes. The protocol included prompts to promote reflection and discussion regarding (a) prior experiences working with MLLs, (b) perceptions of MLLs' well-being, (c) factors influencing well-being, (d) personal efforts to address well-being, and (e) schoolwide efforts to address well-being.

Table 2. Study Details

Site	Data Sources
Acadia	1 focus group with 4 teachers: 4th and 5th grades; 3rd and 4th grade ESL
	4 focus groups with 19 students in 3rd through 5th grades
Dunlap	1 focus group with 3 teachers: 3rd and 5th grades bilingual; art
	1 focus group with 2 social workers
	2 focus groups with 6 students in 3rd through 5th grades
Excelencia	1 focus group with 4 teachers: 3 4th grade bilingual; bilingual special education
	1 interview with bilingual social worker
	2 focus group with 16 students in 4th and 5th grades
Honore	5 interviews with teachers: 3rd, 4th, and 5th grades bilingual; bilingual special education; bilingual reading specialist
	2 interviews with administrator and bilingual social worker
	2 focus groups with 11 students in 4th and 5th grades
Middle	1 focus group with 3 teachers: 2 6th grade language arts; ESL resource
	1 interview with social worker
	2 focus groups with 18 students in 6th and 7th grades

Note.—ESL = English as a Second Language.

To glean students' perspectives, we conducted 12 focus groups, resulting in 218 minutes of audio data with an average of 18 minutes per focus group. We organized groups around school schedules, typically resulting in students grouped by grade level. Older students tended to share more, with fifth-, sixth-, and seventh-grade focus groups averaging 25.5 minutes versus 14.5 minutes for third and fourth graders. Students came to a designated classroom or conference room, where researchers described the study, sought assent, and facilitated groups in English with the option for responses in other languages. The protocol focused on (*a*) experiences in the program, (*b*) things they liked and disliked at school, (*c*) things they felt good and bad about in relation to MLL programs, (*d*) making friends in and out of the program, (*e*) school activities and resources to help MLLs, and (*f*) what they would change to improve their experience.

Shared procedures ensured consistency across sites. Before each interview or focus group, the researcher noted observations of the environment, such as organization of desks and languages on the walls. Before initiating questions, the facilitator gathered logistical and demographic information, such as number of participants and self-described cultural identities. Data collection involved audio-recording sessions, which were later transcribed. After interviews and focus groups, researchers captured thoughts on memos to share with the research team.

Data Analysis

To make sense of the data, we used interpretive analysis to understand MLLs' well-being across cases (RQ1), as well as structures and practices that influenced well-being within cases (RQ2; Erickson, 1986; Merriam, 1998). To initially approach the large data set without preconceived notions of what themes might emerge, we first used inductive analysis to read and code transcripts in response to the research questions. Team members (*a*) immersed themselves in the data collected across sites, (*b*) independently coded emergent themes based on their reading, and (*c*) captured questions and ideas in analytic memos.

The research team convened to discuss themes in the data. Many themes emerged across team members, such as the impact of language learning on social-emotional well-being (RQ1) and how home language influenced well-being in particular settings (RQ2). We merged related themes and maintained various subcodes noted by different team members, such as the role of curricula (i.e., SEL, literacy, content areas). On some occasions, individuals had divergent codes that we discussed and refined as a team. For example, one team member called attention to differing resources for families outside of schools, which influenced students' well-being and experiences inside schools. By discussing and organizing codes, our coding scheme took shape. Focused on school-related interactions and relationships influencing collective well-being with interconnected factors from homes, communities, and society, we used our previously described theoretical framework to refine and organize codes (see Table 3).

After entering the coding scheme into N-Vivo and agreeing upon procedures for coding (e.g., coding sentences rather than words or phrases), the team engaged in deductive analysis. All team members focused on one school in an attempt to norm the coding scheme. Following analysis of the seven educator interviews and two student focus groups from Honore, we used the coding comparison feature on N-Vivo

Table 3. Coding Scheme

Microsystem (School):	Mesosystem (Home):
Classroom context:	Home and family factors
Learning environment	Home-language communication
The role of language	Instructional funds of knowledge
The role of curricula	Resources and supports for families
Interpersonal relationships:	Exosystem (Community):
Student-peer interactions	Economic disparities
Student-teacher interactions	Racial segregation
School environment and structures:	School district
Extracurricular activities	Macrosystem (Society):
Integration among students	Cultural groups and interactions
Supplemental services	Cultural identities and norms
	Language ideologies
	Racial and ethnic stereotypes

to note and discuss divergent codes. For example, within the microsystem category, coders noted the same passage as "student-peer interactions" and "integration among students." We talked through how we perceived those two codes and came to agreement on the distinction between student-peer interactions in the classroom and integration among students in the school. Following the norming discussion, team members independently refined coding on the case of Honore, which yielded a high level of intercoder reliability. Select team members then coded data from the remaining four cases.

We then used N-Vivo to understand trends across cases, including overall trends in MLLs' social-emotional well-being (RQ1) and specific trends by program model (RQ2). First, we organized all data sources into cases and assigned characteristics based on program model (e.g., TBE, TWI, ESL), grade levels (i.e., elementary, middle school), and student demographics (e.g., primarily Latinx, ethnically diverse). We then ran queries using characteristics to determine trends within and across cases and programs; for example, positive teacher-student interactions emerged across cases, whereas the middle school had higher incidence of negative teacher-student interactions. Using query results, we drafted, tested, and confirmed assertions.

Data Validation

We integrated various procedures to ensure the validity and plausibility of this qualitative multiple-case study (Merriam, 1998). Whereas interviews and focus groups with participants occupied the primary focus of the research, secondary data in the form of artifacts (i.e., school report cards, websites) and observations (i.e., memos and notes from interactions) allowed for triangulation of findings. Not only did we frequently member check as a research team but also sent summaries of findings to participating educators to review. We also present the findings in this article with rich detail that emphasizes the voices of the participants of themselves, allowing readers to connect with the five cases and determine whether they ring true in other settings.

We also prioritized reflexivity across the research process. All authors engaged in this work as doctoral-level professionals or students with backgrounds in MLL

education and psychology. In addition, all identified as multilingual and had experience working in schools. The first and second authors had previously partnered with focal districts on a professional development grant, which nurtured relationships with administrators who opened the door to this research. This familiarity with the focal contexts enriched preliminary understandings of the districts, schools, programs, and communities; however, we regularly discussed issues of positionality with one another to ensure that our prior experiences and identities did not yield bias, blind spots, or sensitivities. The resultant findings are described in the next section.

Findings

In this section, we share the findings of the multiple-case study of five K–8 schools with distinct program models serving MLLs. We organize findings around four themes that emerged from the data as influential to well-being, including (a) relationships with teachers in supportive or unsupportive classrooms, (b) connectedness with peers in integrated or segregated schools, (c) home-language prioritization in additive or subtractive programs, and (d) sense of belonging in inclusive or exclusive communities. Each subsection begins with an overview of findings within that theme, followed by exploration of related assertions.

Supportive or Unsupportive Classrooms: Relationships with Teachers

Across schools, students lauded ESL and bilingual classrooms as safe, welcoming, and engaging spaces. In 11 of 12 focus groups, students described happiness in ESL and bilingual classrooms where teachers fostered positive and supportive spaces for learning. Whereas elementary settings allowed students to remain in safe-haven classrooms with expert language teachers for the full school day, the middle school prompted daily interactions with general-education teachers where students did not feel consistently supported or valued.

Teachers with language expertise support students. Rapport with ESL and bilingual teachers emerged as influential to well-being with students across schools describing how they prompted feelings of safety, support, comfort, and confidence. In 11 of 12 groups, students said teachers made them feel good or proud to be in MLL programming. When asked about trusted individuals with whom they could talk to at school, students regularly responded by indicating their teachers. One fourth-grade Latina from Excelencia shared, "I like the teachers are always there for you, and they will always help you."

In bilingual program models, including Excelencia, Honore, and Dunlap, Spanish-speaking students noted the value of bilingual teachers who used both languages while teaching. These teachers had elementary licensure with bilingual endorsements, signaling advanced language proficiency and specific preparation in bilingual classroom pedagogy. Learning and communicating with teachers in Spanish emerged as important to students, though participants agreed that connections and relationships varied by teacher. Using her schoolwide perspective, the bilingual reading interventionist at Honore shared, "Our third-grade teacher does an amazing job of

aconnecting, building rapport, and being that person. It's stronger than any other rooms ain this building. And I know it's not just because she's teaching the curriculum, it's because she is delivering it in an amazing way. It's because of the connection she has [with students]." Excelencia students appreciated TWI classroom teachers' bilingualism and noted the distinction with other educators in the building. One fifth-grade Latina noted, "Our [classroom] teachers speak Spanish but not the art teachers or gym teachers, and I wish they did."

In ESL program models, including Acadia, Dunlap, and Middle, students received language-focused support for one portion of the school day while working with the ESL-trained resource teacher. These teachers with language-specific preparation supported well-being through scaffolded interactions with students. A Brazilian fourth-grade girl at Dunlap reflected back to her ESL teacher the previous year: "I miss the teacher, she was really nice and kind and sometimes when we did not get it, and we got frustrated she would help with a word. She was patient." A Ukrainian seventh-grade girl shared, "You have teachers who can like help translate even if you don't understand something, or who can help you with a project, keep you ahead, help you with studies, or help you with pretty much anything." Other middle school participants concurred with feeling safe and comfortable in the ESL classroom, where the teacher used "easier vocabulary," engaged in "cool projects," and gave "less homework."

General-education teachers yield challenges. Across contexts, students described differing interactions with ESL and bilingual teachers versus general-education teachers; however, this emerged as most evident at Middle, where adolescent MLLs had one period with an ESL-endorsed teacher and the remainder of classes with general-education, content-focused teachers. When conversations shifted to courses outside of their ESL period, students in both sixth- and seventh-grade focus groups shared only negative experiences with teachers who made them feel frustrated, inadequate, or angry. Among this diverse group of students, they agreed that general-education teachers (a) failed to scaffold and support their English development and (b) held cultural stereotypes and biases against them.

Students described feeling frustrated with teachers who used challenging language, both in classroom teaching and in required homework. In the seventh-grade focus group, students discussed the "hard language" in other classes, when an Indian boy and a Latina interjected:

Student 1: They give a lot of homework with hard language so I don't know what to do, and then at home I can't finish it because I don't understand it, so they just yell at you, and I was like, I did not understand it!

Student 2: Like if we ask for help and then they were like you did not ask for help before, so it's basically your fault when we basically did ask for help and got ignored, and they say, "You did not come after school to get help."

These recollections aligned with other statements regarding general-education teachers. First, they found that teachers did not understand how to modify language for students with developing proficiency. Second, they asserted a lack of fairness, with bias against MLLs. A sixth-grade Latino boy shared, "Let's say there is a group of kids and they did not turn in their homework and they are only focusing in on that student

and not the other student who did not do it." They saw teachers as not understanding their needs and punishing rather than listening and supporting.

Students also noted teachers' lack of cultural awareness. Students, including those from Filipino, Mexican, Russian, and Ukrainian backgrounds, recounted stereotypes they perceived teachers to hold of them, such as being angry or disrespectful. They saw stereotypes stemming from a lack of understanding of cultural difference. A Ukrainian girl and Mexican boy surmised:

> **Student 1:** Well like our cultures, like there is a word or something you learn here, but in your culture it is a bad gesture, but like here it is an okay sign, so sometimes the teachers think it is something bad or think you are terrorizing them.
> **Student 2:** The thing is, take Mexico, in certain parts a food is called one thing, and in another part it's called something else. So with that, no one will truly understand the whole of it. So that is why I think most teachers do not understand culture.

After others told their stories of cultural misunderstandings and stereotypes, the Mexican boy circled back: "For me, I live most of my life with racism . . . I have been asked stupid questions, but I have never been offended by it because I truly never cared." In a school with primarily White teachers serving a multilingual student body, he recognized experiences at the school as being rooted in racism, a common occurrence in his young life.

Integrated or Segregated Schools: Focus on Connectedness with Peers

Connectedness with peers fostered influenced students' well-being. In 11 of 12 focus groups, students situated friends in ESL or bilingual classrooms as integral to well-being. Participants described feeling safe among other MLLs, particularly those from similar language background; however, students still benefited from meaningful interaction with non-MLLs from various language backgrounds. Findings indicated that integration among peers was most limited in single-strand bilingual programs where class rosters remained static from year to year.

Interactions with multilingual and English-dominant peers. Students learning in ESL settings asserted the value of learning alongside MLLs. In the seventh-grade group at Middle, eight students from five language backgrounds agreed on the value of learning in the self-contained ESL classroom with other MLLs. Two noted:

> **Student 1:** It is a small classroom, not that many kids, so you talk to everyone, and eventually you become friends.
> **Student 2:** Not just that, you have something in common with them [learning English], which makes it easier to get along.

These students found safety and comfort in friendships with other MLLs, feeling less anxiety and pressure when using English. At Acadia, where MLLs were dispersed across grade levels and received push-in support from ESL resource teachers, students collectively asserted the need for friends from the same language background. One fourth-grade student expounded, "I hadn't found anybody who speaks my

language [Hindi], and I was really sad. But then I found Vidya, who was really friendly and speaks my language, so I feel happy now and found a friend."

In bilingual programs at Dunlap, Excelencia, and Honore, where all students in the classroom used both Spanish and English, students did not have to look far for friends who used the same language. Participants agreed that this supported the development of friendships and well-being. A fourth-grade Latino boy at Honore shared, "We have a lot more in common than if there is just like one kid who speaks Spanish in one of the other [English-medium] classes. But in this class a lot of us speak Spanish, so we have a lot in common." A fifth-grade Latina at Excelencia explained that positive classroom interactions spanned ethnic background. She contended, "All the American kids are friends with all the Spanish [speaking] kids, and they all get along real well." Excelencia's whole-school TWI program combined MLLs and non-MLLs spanning multiple classrooms per grade level, with classroom rosters changing each year to foster relationships among peers across the school. This approach was distinct from Honore's single-strand TWI program where classroom rosters remained static each year, apart from the growing number of English-dominant students who dropped out of the program.

The single-strand approach used in Honore's TWI and Dunlap's TBE programs reduced integration and influenced students' well-being. Teachers described issues with the single-strand approach, focusing on students being with the same peers year after year. A Latina fourth-grade teacher at Excelencia compared single-strand and whole-school approaches: "I came from a bilingual program where it's just one bilingual teacher for each grade level and the same kids knew who was the smart kid, who was the low kid, who was the troublemaker. Whereas here [at Excelencia], it's like you get to make new friends and you build on relationships. Or even right now in fourth grade they come and tell me, 'I was never with so-and-so' and it's like, 'Really? You've been here since kindergarten. You've never crossed paths?'" Students echoed conundrums on how the single-strand approach affected peer relationships. In the fourth-grade group at Honore, students shared:

> **Student 1:** The problem with TWI is that you stay with the same people from kindergarten to fifth grade. After second grade, you are stuck with the same people.
> **Student 2:** We have had no new people since second grade.
> **Interviewer:** So is being stuck with the same people good or bad?
> **Students:** Both.
> **Interviewer:** What is good?
> **Student 3:** You get to be really good friends with them [kids within single strand].
> **Student 1:** But the bad thing is you don't get to know new people.
> **Student 2:** If you are in the same class every year, you have a good relationship with people. But if you change classes, you have more friends.

Lacking integration within classrooms prompted negative experiences in the broader school. Teachers and students across schools discussed issues with integration between MLLs and non-MLLs, but 81% of codes came from participants in the two single-strand programs.

Single-strand programs struggle to integrate students. Schools with single-strand programs attempted to integrate MLLs and non-MLLs during lunch and special

areas. Dunlap educators agreed that students in the TBE program preferred to interact with one another during special areas. After the art teacher explained the self-grouping and reserved behavior observed in her classroom, teachers expounded:

> **Teacher 1:** They usually don't want to branch out. Maybe they are more nervous. It's not that they don't want to, they don't know if it's okay . . .
> **Teacher 2:** I think that would be the biggest thing. It's harder for them to make friends. Because they are just so used to being put together with the same people that they are not going to branch out, like you said.
> **Teacher 3:** My group of students have been together for six years. From kindergarten all the way up to fifth with the same group of students. Whereas the monolingual students get intermixed. So when you're saying that they gravitate towards each other in art, it's because they've been with these people for so many years. These are their friends.

Dunlap social workers saw the primary issue taking place in the lunchroom, where students were assigned seats to integrate them across the four classrooms per grade level. One illustrated, "You are sitting at a table with 30 kids. You may know five of them at all, and maybe like only one of them. Maybe you like all of them, but everybody else [outside of TBE] has a much bigger pool of kids to choose from. They are more comfortable with them." Participants recognized the role of peer relationships on well-being, as well as the failure of schoolwide integration efforts to foster cross-classroom relationships.

At Honore, stakeholders' perceptions of cross-school integration efforts varied. In separate interviews, teachers discussed the school's failed attempt to integrate students during lunchtime. The initiative aimed to integrate students across program strands but was terminated after pushback from White, affluent parents. The fifth-grade Latina teacher recounted,

> They [non-TWI parents] did not want their kids to be forced to sit with anyone at lunch, it was their time. My [TWI] parents thought it was a great idea. My parents loved mixing the kids up so that they are less isolated, but the other parents were like, "No." And, for those 20 minutes a day, hmm, the kids were fine with it. So I don't know what happened, if the kids went home and complained or if the parents just didn't like it. So eventually Mr. C [principal] just said no, stop it, because he was just getting so many calls from parents from the other classrooms.

Honore also integrated students during special areas, which was the most common locale for bullying, which we describe in the final findings subsection. Despite awareness of non-MLLs' bullying, the principal perceived challenges to integration as stemming from MLLs. "Our EL students tend to stick close together and even with a lot of concerted efforts from parents of non-EL students and of teachers to mix up students and give them different experiences . . . They tend to have strong loyalty towards one another." Reflecting a sentiment shared by other White educators across schools, he assumed that MLLs simply preferred to be around one another, rather than questioning the nature of their interactions with peers or larger systemic issues around race, class, and language in the school.

With failed attempts to integrate students at the school level, Honore and Dunlap teachers endeavored to foster collaboration among peers with grade-level colleagues. At Dunlap, the White fifth-grade TBE teacher saw the same issues as those in special areas. She explained, "When we do mix groups, we mix groups for science and social studies too. I see a lot of my students falling through the cracks because they are not asking the new teacher for help, and they are not getting together with other students. They flock towards each other and they are not willing to speak up in class." But at Honore, an interesting finding emerged regarding perceived inequities in the curriculum. When asked about things they did not like about the TWI program in the fifth-grade group, one Latina asserted, "Sometimes when we go into other classrooms, I see posters of stuff we did not learn in our class . . . They should teach us the rest of the stuff they are teaching the other kids." The fifth-grade Latina teacher expounded upon this issue. Whereas English-medium classrooms in this affluent neighborhood had copious books and materials, TWI classrooms had translated versions of the curriculum, printed on copy paper and placed in binders, and few high-quality Spanish-language texts. She reflected,

> They [TWI students] are sometimes aware of that, like in social studies. My teacher over there [non-TWI class], it was a big project on the American Revolution, and it's a big research thing, and there's a lot of books available to them, and that's something that I don't get to . . . So they have noticed, "Oh, why don't we get to do that?" Or, "Why don't we get to do this project that this teacher is doing?" And I don't know, I don't plan with them. I don't see what their projects are. I've never planned with anybody, you know?

Because of the segregated nature of the single-strand program for both teachers and students, students came to recognize curricular disparities when interacting with peers in other classrooms, diminishing connectedness and deepening sentiments of marginalization.

Additive or Subtractive Programs: Focus on Home-Language Prioritization

Findings demonstrated that the school's formal prioritization of home language via program-model designation enhanced well-being. Students in TWI programs, where MLLs' home language of Spanish served as an integral medium for curricula and home-school communication, demonstrated enhanced pride in their bilingualism. TWI programs also led to enhanced school-based supports for parents and students in contrast to other models.

Additive programs fuel pride and parent involvement. Students in TWI programs at Excelencia and Honore portrayed confidence and pride in bilingualism, including 16 statements regarding the value of bilingualism. Fourth and fifth graders in the TWI programs listed benefits of bilingualism, including communicating with families, speaking to people in different countries, translating for peers and adults, impressing people with their language skills, and being competitive for jobs in the future. Reinforcement of their pride came from parents and teachers. A fifth-grade Latina at Excelencia shared, "When you get older you will still know stuff, like our teachers always say that since we know two languages, we will know more stuff than other

people who know only one language." By contrast, only two students from the remaining three schools discussed the value of home language, and five students expressed doubt in their bilingual abilities. A Latino seventh grader from Middle shared, "I traveled to Mexico because my brother got married but I struggled speaking to her parents [in Spanish], but they understood me and I understood them, so I don't feel like I will need it [home language] other than that."

Valuing students' home languages also influenced parent involvement, particularly in the case of Excelencia where Spanish had presence across the school. Though this study did not involve parents, educators expounded upon parents' engagement due to the prioritization of Spanish at Excelencia. The social worker credited the teachers: "Because they are able to understand both languages, if a student is having some issues, then the teachers are more likely to reach out to the parents." But teachers observed the role of larger school environment. In the teacher focus group, they recounted the school's approach to parent events:

> **Teacher 1:** They [school leaders] bring in a Spanish speaker, and it's with families that they know and families and communities are like "Te vas a ir?" "Yeah I'm gonna go. Yeah, they have childcare," or "They're gonna give the kids pizza." And so the kids are like, "Oh we're gonna have pizza, let's go, Mom." And they know they're gonna have someone to watch the kids so they can enjoy it, so we're like, accommodating that. Whereas, for example, a [5k] race—a hustle—they don't understand. They're gonna be like, "Why am I gonna run? Why am I gonna pay to go run?" They don't get that.
>
> **Teacher 2:** Well, even like last year in the middle school for curriculum night. They never have someone that goes to translate in Spanish, so I went, and no one showed up. There was no—not even just dual [language] families—there were no Latino families that showed up for that sixth-grade orientation.

Teachers recognized an enhanced sense of belonging due to the school's use of culturally relevant parent programming, a sense of community among families, and the consistent use of Spanish. When fifth graders moved from Excelencia to the local middle school, they saw parent engagement drop off due to lack of home-language usage.

Home-language prioritization influences student supports. Home-language prioritization influenced the supports students received. In addition to the value of bilingual teachers in classrooms, described in the first subsection, TWI programs offered other services in Spanish that nurtured MLLs' well-being. We asked students about adults in the school they would go to with a problem; whereas students across schools responded with classroom or ESL resource teachers, students in TWI programs noted relationships with other educators, including bilingual special-education teachers, reading interventionists, and social workers. In the fourth-grade group at Honore, students listed bilingual support staff.

> **Student 1:** They have some people you can go and talk to if you have problems [social worker]. And a teacher who can help you with reading.
> **Student 2:** She [reading specialist] helps everyone.
> **Student 1:** But she speaks Spanish.

The fifth-grade group had a similar exchange, reflecting similar roles in the school.

Student 1: Ms. [reading specialist] comes in and helps in the classroom.
Student 2: There is Ms. [special-education teacher], and she will talk Spanish to us.
Student 3: She takes Lupe for math.

Reflecting upon trusted adults in the building, students in TWI programs conveyed additional layers of support via nonclassroom bilingual educators, specifically noting the role of home-language communication in these relationships.

Discussions with social workers across schools demonstrated marked differences in the social-emotional supports provided to MLLs based on home-language prioritization within program models. At TWI schools, social workers were bilingual Latinas with preparation as bilingual social workers. With their roles couched in TWI programs, they provided MLLs with targeted supports. At Excelencia, the social worker described working with students hesitant to use English, which she perceived as influential to their ability to connect and make friends: "For me, it is about figuring out why they [students] don't want to speak English . . . I try to work with them on the anxiety part but also in my sessions I try to incorporate English if they are like more Spanish dominant because it is a safe setting." The social worker at Honore also prioritized anxiety but spoke to her role in mediating larger societal issues around the Trump presidency. She shared, "During the Trump election, there was a huge shift. And I got a lot of parents feeling very anxious, and a lot of kids feeling a lot of anxiety and fear." Using their bilingualism, they supported the specific needs of MLLs.

The approach at non-TWI schools emerged as notably distinct, where MLLs were mixed with non-MLLs to receive general social-emotional supports. At Acadia, participants described support groups on emotional regulation and self-advocacy facilitated by social workers for students with documented needs. Dunlap social workers explained a similar approach, revealing that they often did not know which students on their caseloads were MLLs. At Middle, the social worker described an overwhelming caseload, where she did not have the capacity to differentiate for MLLs. She shared that newcomers, those MLLs who had recently immigrated, became part of her "new student social support group" that was not specific to MLLs. She divulged, "Honestly, we got a list at the beginning of the year who's new to sixth grade, seventh grade, and eighth grade, and we offer like a new support group. Anyone new here, so they're mixed in with other kids." Middle teachers also discussed newcomers, specifically their lack of access to social workers' programming. The ESL teacher noted, "We don't have any counseling that we offer in any language besides English . . . Newcomers don't participate. Some other kids do. But they have to have their [English] language up to a good level before they do."

Inclusive or Exclusive Communities: Focus on Sense of Belonging

Sense of belonging emerged as influential toward students' well-being. Whereas Acadia and Dunlap enrolled kids who lived in the immediate neighborhood of the school, Excelencia, Honore, and Middle bused students in from other neighborhoods

in the larger school district. Busing influenced MLLs' sense of belonging in the school, as did bullying from non-MLL peers grounded in language ideologies and cultural stereotypes prevalent in US society.

Busing diminishes sense of belonging. To facilitate TWI programs, districts relied on busing MLLs in from other neighborhoods to yield the 50/50 split between Spanish- and English-dominant students. At Honore, all MLLs were bused in from a ward of the city that the third-grade teacher poignantly depicted as "across the river, literally and metaphorically." The district required Spanish-speaking MLLs to participate in the TWI program, situated in an affluent White neighborhood of the racially and socioeconomically segregated suburb. The reading specialist described when the bus pulls up each day: "It's visceral. You can just—you can see it, you can feel it, you can smell it. The bus comes and drops off a group of [Latinx] kids and the way they interact and just watching them." The social worker reflected on MLLs coming to Honore each day: "They're not from the neighborhood. They know they're very different."

Students at nonneighborhood schools noted the impact of busing on their experiences and interactions with peers. Participants described exclusion from extracurricular activities due to their need to take the bus home. A fifth grader at Excelencia explained that he did not participate in after-school programs because of inequities in busing to the "East" neighborhood where most Latinx students lived. He shared, "My mom doesn't let me go because it's too late. It's for the bus, they do all the Lake kids first, then they go to Main, and then they go to East last even though its closer." At Honore, fifth graders shared that many of them did not participate in sports because "a lot of us take the bus and could not make the practices." Their teacher connected issues with busing to students' sense of belonging. She reflected, "We have picnics going on after school, we have other before- and after-school activities that aren't as easy for other kids. So they are less prone to participating and feeling like part of the community."

Busing students in from other neighborhoods also yielded economic disparities, which influenced MLLs' experiences in school. Educators at all schools noted socioeconomic impacts, such as some students' ability to afford after-school activities and field trips, as well as access to health insurance and external supports such as therapists. In TWI programs, however, teachers recounted stories of MLLs making up stories to mirror the experiences of their English-dominant peers who lived in the neighborhood. The reading specialist at Honore recounted:

> Just watching kids try to be competitive and compare themselves to neighborhood kids in conversation around holidays. You know, what are you doing over winter break? We're going to France or we're going skiing in Aspen and doing all this. And then I would see my Latino kids make up stories about things and pretend they were doing things because they felt like they had to. And it's not just that they were making up those stories, but I saw it in their academic success also and how they performed . . . And again, the kids aren't different. It's the environment that makes it different and draws that out of the kids, and it's just heartbreaking.

Whereas all educators noted economic disparities as influencing school experiences, the most drastic disparities and subsequent impacts on well-being emerged in TWI programs.

Cultural and linguistic divisions stoke bullying and discrimination. In all 12 focus groups, students recalled experiences where they were made fun of, bullied, called names, teased, excluded, and targeted with racial slurs, nasty jokes, and disparaging comments. These interactions happened primarily during informal times of the school day, including lunch, recess, in the hallway, and on the bus. Nonetheless, instances also occurred during formal school time, including field trips, special areas (e.g., physical education), and extracurriculars. Each reported instance involved English-dominant peers targeting MLLs due to cultural or linguistic differences, which negatively influenced students' sense of belonging in the school. The severity and frequency of these instances varied by setting.

Students revealed being teased due to developing English, as well as speaking other languages. A fourth grader at Dunlap asserted, "Sometimes they [MLLs] get bullied because of their language. I got bullied last year because kids said my language [Portuguese] sounded funny." At Acadia, Indian students recalled bullying "because they have a different language" and "about your color, the way you speak." Honore students described frequent bullying from English-dominant kids, with one boy sharing, "When we were practicing graduation, when we were on stage talking in Spanish, there were other fifth graders in the audience saying, do they even know English? They are so stupid." In the seventh-grade group at Middle, a Latino boy divulged being made fun of outside of ESL class "because I cannot pronounce certain words." A Ukrainian girl responded with her coping strategy: "Whenever I can't pronounce a word, I just go, 'Sorry, my English is really bad.' Like with a friends group, and they just laugh—not at me, but with me. It's a different thing. You have to realize you have a problem and say, 'Look, I know it's a problem. Don't make fun of me.'" Reflecting monolingual ideologies, students endured regular victimization based on language, with some succumbing to the belief that their language was a problem rather than an asset.

In addition to bullying based on language, students across programs experienced bullying connected to racial and ethnic stereotypes common in US society. Fifth graders at Honore recalled lunchtime interaction with students outside of the bilingual program:

> **Student 1:** They said we should all be in prison because we are illegal and crossed the border.
> **Student 2:** And another kid in the other class says all we eat is rice and beans.
> **Student 3:** They forgot about all the other delicious foods we eat! Like tacos.
> **Student 1:** Then they said, what is a Mexican's favorite sport? Swimming. You know, swimming [to cross the] border.

At Excelencia, Honore, and Dunlap, the three schools with predominantly Latinx MLLs, educators saw increases in these interchanges after the 2016 election, with children expressing concern for their parents being deported. The special-education teacher at Excelencia explained, "Just because EL students are also mixed with students that they may not hang out with outside of school because they don't live in the same communities, there were instances where students would say things like 'build a wall' or things like that at school. That probably had a part in it [concern for parents' deportation]."

Whereas bullying occurred at every school, this was coded with greater frequency in the single-strand TWI program. At other schools, two or three students recalled an instance of bullying, whereas the 11 students at Honore recounted 8 examples with 1 participant exclaiming that there were "so many I can't count." With the district busing Latinx MLLs to an affluent White neighborhood for TWI, the single-strand model divided students by race, class, and language. In the fourth-grade group, students recounted playing soccer in gym class where White students called them "the Mexicans." One student expounded, "Yeah, it's like, 'Mexicans suck, the world versus Mexicans.' And then the kids in other classes will gang up on us." Fifth graders also shared the us-versus-them mentality, again connecting to gym class; one girl generalized, "In soccer, we hear a lot of people say it's TWI versus non-TWI. And there are a lot more people not in TWI than in TWI." These interactions negatively influenced students' well-being. When asked what they would change, a fifth-grade Latina responded, "I would change people, to stop seeing us different, see us as the same." Other students quickly agreed.

Discussion

The need to prioritize well-being in schools has never been greater. The pandemic continues to ravage schools and society, resulting in the loss of loved ones, disabilities from long COVID, reduced social interactions from closures and restrictions, health and financial concerns, and overall anxiety and despair in a changing society. For MLLs and immigrant-origin children, this exacerbates existing challenges to well-being, such as traumas related to immigration and family separation, stressors related to documentation and discrimination, and challenges emergent from maneuvering schools and developing relationships across cultures and languages (e.g., Harklau & Moreno, 2019; Juang et al., 2018; Rishel & Miller, 2017). Amid this context, we must reiterate the need to focus on well-being, which is central to the social and academic experiences of students often marginalized in schools by race, ethnicity, class, and language (Harrell, 2014; Niehaus et al., 2017).

Educators have agency to enact change that influences well-being. Focused on the microsystem of schools, this research solidifies the importance of positive relationships and connectedness among peers and educators in classrooms (Bronfrenbrenner, 1981; Harrell, 2018). Findings confirm those from previous research, including the significance of MLLs' and immigrant-origin students' (a) relationships with teachers (Baker, 2017; Chang et al., 2007; Cho et al., 2019), (b) perceived safety of ESL or bilingual classrooms (Li, 2010; Pappamihiel, 2002), (c) social and emotional benefits of using home languages (Bearse & de Jong, 2008; Han, 2010; Kang et al., 2014), and (d) challenges integrating with non-MLL peers (Duff, 2001; Mendez et al., 2012; Tsai, 2006). With this study involving children in elementary settings, findings extend those from previous studies conducted largely with adolescents in secondary schools (Baker, 2017; Bearse & de Jong, 2008; Duff, 2001; Li, 2010; Mendez et al., 2012; Pappamihiel, 2002; Tsai, 2006). In addition, this study indicates how structures and practices related to program model influence these factors, such as the enhanced challenges of nurturing teacher relationships in the middle school model or peer relationships in single-strand models.

Nonetheless, educators' and students' daily actions and interactions cannot undo the broader systemic issues at play influencing MLLs' well-being. The multilayered systems conceptually nested around schools result in myriad cultural, community, and societal factors that influence MLLs' school-based experiences (Bronfrenbrenner, 1994; Harrell, 2015). These ecosystemic frameworks deepen our understandings of participants' daily experiences and resulting well-being; we see not only how the immediate learning environment shapes students' development but also how broader social and cultural factors manifest in the school to influence MLLs. For example, findings expose negative interactions between peers across larger schools, with MLLs experiencing bullying, teasing, and name-calling from non-MLLs. Within the microsystem of school, these interactions stem from lack of meaningful integration among students in MLL and general-education programming (Duff, 2001; Mendez et al., 2012; Tsai, 2006). But this daily reality remains grounded in larger systemic issues, such as segregation between ethnic groups in the community, school-district requirements to bus MLLs to schools outside their neighborhoods, and rampant racism in societal and political discourse targeting MLLs and immigrants (Flores & García, 2017).

This cross-systemic conceptualization of MLLs' experiences is important when grappling with these issues in schools. For example, schools like Honore or Dunlap can attempt to integrate students, such as requiring MLLs and non-MLLs sit together at lunch; however, these quick-fix efforts do not respond to segregation and discrimination within the community and society (Flores, 2016; Flores & García, 2017). Indeed, certain findings in this study provide a dismal picture of MLLs' well-being in schools, such as the bullying that children endure based on culture and language (Duff, 2001; Mendez et al., 2012). But when considered in the context of a US society pervaded by monolingual ideologies and cultural stereotypes, these findings regarding discrimination and marginalization in children's daily experiences are not surprising (Nguyen & Kebede, 2017). But they should incite action, as experiences with racism negatively influence students' well-being and learning (Hammond, 2015; Harrell, 2014). Stakeholders can begin this work by critically looking at program models for MLLs, which draw from larger systems (e.g., home languages, community demographics, state policies) to shape daily practice.

Implications for Program-Model Implementation

Program models are an integral component of MLL education, serving as the bridge between policy and practice and providing common approaches across the United States (García & Kleifgen, 2018). Because of the importance of program models, key studies that compare programmatic outcomes are common reading among educational stakeholders (Estrada et al., 2019; Thomas & Collier, 2002; Umansky & Reardon, 2014). Although these studies provide important findings regarding the efficacy of programs in bolstering language learning and academic achievement, they cannot serve as a universal roadmap for stakeholders to select one model and assume students will thrive. Our findings indicate the need to scrutinize programmatic structures and practices that influence MLLs' subsequent experiences and well-being.

Two schools in our study implement TWI, often heralded as the gold standard of bilingual education due to integrating MLLs and non-MLLs and developing additive bilingualism (Collier & Thomas, 2004). But our study yields findings regarding

how variations in TWI can influence well-being, particularly the distinction between whole-school and single-strand approaches. Previous studies have explored repercussions of single-strand programs, finding that (*a*) teachers hold deficit-based perspectives and racial stereotypes about MLLs, (*b*) students internally segregate based on ethnicity and language, and (*c*) school decisions respond to the needs of White, English-dominant parents (Dorner, 2011; Palmer, 2010). With this study spanning schools with and without single-strand models, we discovered social-emotional impacts on MLLs moving through elementary grades with the same students, lacking friendships with non-MLL students, and subsequent bullying, exclusion, and discrimination.

But larger cultural and institutional issues influence school practice (Bronfrenbrenner, 1994; Harrell, 2015). In the case of Honore, the single-strand model does indeed invoke divides between classrooms, but the district's approach—requiring Spanish-speaking MLLs to participate in TWI and busing them to an affluent White neighborhood—exacerbates the divisions between students and the social-emotional repercussions. This finding aligns with the cautionary advice about TWI programs given 25 years ago by Guadalupe Valdés (1997), who envisioned problems in merging children from White, English-dominant, affluent homes and MLLs from working-class, language-minoritized families. Nelson Flores (2016) has continued this line of critique, arguing that bilingual education perpetuates social hierarchies and racism by prioritizing White students and subsequently marginalizing MLLs. This study provides evidence of these scholars' assertions: a district using Latinx MLLs to benefit White students' access to TWI programming demonstrates the resulting hierarchies and racist interactions among peers that shape MLLs' experiences and well-being in school.

Findings from this study demonstrate that TWI programs in K–8 schools do offer social-emotional benefits by prioritizing students' home languages (Bearse & de Jong, 2008; Kibler et al., 2014). Research has long confirmed the benefit of home-language instruction for children's learning and English-language development (Hakuta & Díaz, 1985; Thomas & Collier, 2002). This study demonstrates that use of students' home languages in schools positively influences students' well-being. Although TWI programs are not viable in all schools, we contend that stakeholders can implement programs to value students' home language and prioritize integration. In the collaborative approach between general-education and ESL teachers at Acadia, for example, students communicate with one another in home languages and learn alongside non-MLL peers in English. With the appropriate preparation, teachers could integrate students' home languages and subsequently attend to MLLs' well-being.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

Recommendations center on prioritizing MLLs' well-being. Stakeholders gather myriad data to evaluate students' academic and language learning; however, well-being has not been prioritized as an educational outcome. Theory and research reinforce the importance of attending to MLLs' well-being (e.g., Krashen, 1982; Niehaus et al., 2017); however, this pertinent focus loses out to state and federal accountability measures including English proficiency and academic achievement. Educators should consider ways to collect meaningful data about students' well-being, using

that to guide decision-making regarding programs and practices in schools. We recommend consulting Harrell's *Multidimensional Well-Being Assessment* (2014); educators can consider how the reflective prompts written for adults might be modified and used with children to understand dimensions such as relational well-being (e.g., engagement with friends, family members, others), emotional well-being (e.g., feeling empowered, hopeful, inspired), and collective well-being (e.g., identity related to culture, family, community).

Stakeholders should also probe existing program models to ensure they benefit MLLs. We recommend exploring six facets: (*a*) relationships and interactions between MLLs and educators, (*b*) integration and interactions between MLL and non-MLL peers, (*c*) quality of classroom curriculum and instruction for MLLs, (*d*) equity in access to supplemental services and school activities, (*e*) prioritization of home language and cultural practices, and (*f*) students' and families' sense of belonging at the school. We encourage prioritization of MLLs in professional learning opportunities, recognizing that educators may need to develop, deepen, or refine expertise to become confident in fostering safe learning spaces, developing relationships, scaffolding instruction, and sustaining learners' cultural and linguistic assets.

Embracing shared priorities on MLLs and well-being, change efforts must involve multiple stakeholders. Classroom teachers, including ESL, bilingual, and general-education teachers, can deepen relationships with MLLs and their families. Grade-level teams can collaboratively approach planning and discussions around MLLs and their experiences to foster connectedness among peers. Social workers can consider the MLLs in their building and modify services to uniquely nurture their social-emotional well-being. Resource and special-area teachers can talk to MLLs and their teachers to garner insights on trends in students' experiences and well-being across the school. Leaders can amass relevant data and initiate efforts to rectify issues emergent from program models and broader school structures. In sum, all stakeholders are needed to tackle the systemic issues influencing MLLs' well-being.

Finally, stakeholders need to recognize and address the racism embedded in programs and practices in MLL education (Flores, 2016; Valdés, 1997). As evidenced in this study, children and adolescents consistently experience acts of racism in our schools, which negatively influence their well-being (Harrell, 2014, 2015). This racism often emerges from mandated procedures and program models, such as the deficit-based ascription of the EL label, the lack of the single-strand approach to bilingual education, and the lack of general-education teachers' preparation for MLLs. As we seek to disrupt the systemic racism of US schools, attention must be paid to the programs and services that are tacitly accepted as the norm in educating MLLs.

Limitations and Considerations for Future Research

Although this study provides important findings on MLLs' well-being in schools, limitations to the design may shape how readers draw from findings. The case-study approach comes with limitations, as findings are not necessarily generalizable but can still ring true across settings (Merriam, 1998). For example, the TWI programs in this study are not indicative of all TWI programs, and findings must be considered within the contextual details and demographics of the focal cases. Limitations also

emerge when considering the five cases were all US schools using ESL, TBE, and TWI programming without exhaustive sampling of grade levels (i.e., high school), programs (i.e., one-way immersion), and contexts (e.g., rural settings). Given the study's focus on elementary students from diverse linguistic backgrounds, the English-medium dialogue with students regarding their well-being may have limited potential responses and findings.

We recommend that this interpretive, multiple-case study serves as a starting place for future research to investigate MLLs' well-being spanning preschool to high school, including more expansive program variations and diversity among communities and students. Researchers might consider adding data sources, such as classroom observations and interviews with families. Although future research might expand beyond the scope of case studies, we encourage a qualitative component to investigations on well-being, particularly with elementary-age students who may not be able to complete lengthy or complex surveys. As evidenced in this study, students have poignant stories to tell, and stakeholders need to listen and act upon those stories. Recent events hold the potential to negatively influence MLLs' well-being, including the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing struggles for racial justice. We must prioritize this work in our research and practice, embracing our agency to promote change for MLLs in schools.

Note

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