

Elia Dimayuga-Bruggeman
Narrator

Lorena Duarte
Interviewer

November 1, 2010
Brooklyn Center, Minnesota

Elia Bruggeman **-EB**
Lorena Duarte **-LD**

LD: Today is Monday, November 1, 2010. I'm Lorena Duarte and I will be conducting the interview today. I am here with Elia Bruggeman at Northwest Suburban Integration School District in Brooklyn Center. I'm here to conduct an interview for the Latino Oral History Project for the Minnesota Historical Society. So first of all, Elia, thank you so much. I know you're very, very busy so we really appreciate you taking the time to give us your oral history.

EB: Yes.

LD: Okay. So first of all if you could start off with your name and how to spell it.

EB: Okay. Elia Dimayuga-Bruggeman. It's hyphenated.

LD: Okay, great. And what is your date of birth?

EB: Oh, I have to think. [Laughter] I was born October 15, 1958.

LD: Oh, you just had a birthday.

EB: Yes, yes.

LD: *¡Feliz cumpleaños!* [Happy birthday!]

EB: Gracias!

LD: Okay. Tell me a little bit about where you were born and your family, the names of your parents, and if you had any siblings.

EB: Yes. I was born in Mexico in the small town of Las Mesas. And my father, he actually worked on the farm. We had a farm, and my mother had a little restaurant. And I do have lots of siblings. I have fourteen brothers and sisters.

LD: Oh, my goodness!

EB: [Chuckles]

LD: And where are you in the order?

EB: I am actually number seven.

LD: Okay, you're right in the middle.

EB: [Chuckles] In half, yes. And one of my sisters was adopted, so in total we are fifteen with me. Yes, there are lots of children.

LD: Wow. And what was that like, growing up on a small farm and with so many siblings?

EB: I'll tell you, I was born on the farm. But after I was born, we moved to town, to the town of Las Mesas.

LD: Okay.

EB: And we actually moved because by then my father was in the Bracero Program. It was in that program that he came to the U.S. to work, and he used to come to Missouri to work in the cotton fields. So then when I was born, he wasn't there, he was here, in the United States. So then is when my mom came into town, and we came to stay with my grandma and grandpa.

We stayed there until my father actually came back. The contracts were for certain months, and so that meant that he came back and forth.

Growing up with lots of brothers and sisters was actually great. We all shared our bunk beds, you know, and shared the clothing. And my father always told us, "You are not going to have a TV in your room, you will never have a car. What you will get is your education." And, basically, he gave us all an education. He only had, you know, up to sixth grade education.

LD: Yes. Wow.

EB: Yes. But we were, and we still are, a very close family; fourteen children is a lot of children, so we older siblings helped the younger ones. Like my older siblings helped me. After the Depression and that, my father educated the first three. And then the rest, we educated each other, along with his guidance and his help, of course.

LD: Sure. Yes. And what kind of a kid were you? What did you like to do? Were you studious, did you like sports? What did you like as a kid?

EB: Actually, I did like to study and I liked sports. I played soccer and I also played basketball and I played volleyball. I was also part of the poetry club and folklore dancing club.

LD: Oh, wow.

EB: When I was in ninth grade I took the championship in our state for folklore dancing. So I loved folklore dancing. And I continued to study folklore dancing until I finished preparatory school up to twelfth grade, which is equal to high school here. The folklore dancing classes took place in the evening through the *plazas comunitarias*. I got a certificate to teach Mexican folklore dancing for adults or children.

LD: Oh.

EB: That's one of my loves that I have always had. And I still do—well, later on I will tell you what I did teaching folklore dancing here in Minnesota! [Chuckles]

LD: Sure, sure. That's wonderful. So tell me about your studies. Obviously, your field is education. So I'm just curious, what did you like to study? Was there any particular thing that you focused on? And what was high school, etcetera, like?

EB: Well, in high school I did like to study a lot the world languages. I studied English, because my dream was actually to become an international lawyer.

LD: Oh.

EB: I didn't achieve that—and we will talk about that later on when I tell you why. However, the one subject that I didn't really like was math. But the social studies, the English, the sciences, I loved all those subjects. And especially the arts. You know, in Mexico you go through your secondary school trying some classes--what we call *tallers*. This type of classes gives you the opportunity to try various types of hands on careers.

LD: Yes.

EB: Where you try different set of skills and interest, kind of like vocational and technical college, to focus on the area that you want to enter once you get to college. When I was in ninth grade, because English was my favorite subject, I asked my father if I could become a foreign exchange student.

LD: Oh.

EB: And prior to that, my family works in the fields. My dad told me that he was going to send me to the U.S. to study English, but it was going to be in the form of a foreign exchange student. Because he said that when he was here he saw a lot of discrimination that went on. And he said, "I'm not going to send you to go to school where you'll have to stay there as a migrant worker." He said, "You're going to see how different you are going to be treated." And *Boy*, did I see the difference when I came.

LD: Really.

EB: Thinking back when I came, and when I was young and living here, migrant students are treated different than foreign exchange student. Seeing what some of the kids go through, I can see the difference in how is it that students are treated. Anyway, so I came for a whole year, and I came to the community of Sleepy Eye, Minnesota.

LD: When you were in the ninth grade?

EB: In ninth grade, yes.

LD: Okay.

EB: I came as a foreign exchange student when I was sixteen.

LD: You were sixteen. Do you know why you went to Sleepy Eye? Was that just what your school had set up or did you have family here?

EB: No. No, actually, I came through a program called Youth For Understanding (YFU). And the community that I had chosen to go to was in Michigan, in northern Michigan. However, when they bring the profiles of the students to the people who are interested in having foreign exchange students, I was chosen by a family from Sleepy Eye. I remember coming on the plane saying, but I don't want to go to Minnesota, I'm supposed to go to Michigan! [Laughter] And then the airline stewardess would say, "But you will love Minnesota, it's a beautiful state, they have so many lakes. And you're going to like it better than Michigan." And yes, when I came I did like it. It was *cold* though.

LD: Oh, yes!

EB: You know, coming from Acapulco where it never gets below seventy-five degrees to come to cold weather. [Laughs] I remember getting off the plane with my winter coat and my Mexican big hat that I had on.

LD: [Laughter] So tell me about that first impression and that year that you spent here as a fifteen-year-old. What was that like? I imagine there was some, not just the climate, but there was some culture shock as well.

EB: Yes.

LD: Tell me a little bit about that.

EB: Well, it was especially hard not being able to speak English. I could read English but I couldn't speak it.

LD: Yes.

EB: I remember when people would go by and I would say, "I, I." I wasn't pronouncing the 'H'! [Laughter] In Spanish the 'H' is silent. So I was going, "I, I," when I was supposed to be saying, "Hi." [Laughter] So anyway, it was a good experience for me as a foreign exchange student. I was having gatherings each monthly, organized by YFU with other foreign exchange students from around the world, and also the family that I had was great, a very loving, caring family. They had only two children, and I had come from a family of, you know...

LD: Fifteen.

EB: Of fifteen. And I had my own room! [Laughs]

LD: Oh, my gosh.

EB: And at school, I took all the subjects assigned plus ESL classes. The school where they placed me was a Catholic school. It was a private school, and there were some nuns there, and they helped me with my English. I was tutored. At that time, in the community of Sleepy Eye, there wasn't many Hispanics when I came in 1974. And as I mentioned before with my folklore dancing, I think that I won over the people from Sleepy Eye by performing. At school I would dance when they had assemblies or their pep fests. I performed my folklore dancing. [Chuckles] I actually brought the costume to dance, and I had a Mexican "*charro*" hat.

LD: Yes.

EB: I was invited by community members to perform and closed their meetings with the Mexican Hat Dance, such as the Newcomers Club or the Eagles Club; I was invited to share the culture of Mexico.

LD: Sure.

EB: So I had a good experience. I played volleyball in the school when I came. That was the only sport they had for girls, actually, at that Catholic school. [Chuckles]

LD: Oh, my gosh.

EB: But it was a good experience.

LD: So then you went back to Mexico and finished up high school?

EB: Yes. I went back to Mexico.

LD: And then what did you do then?

EB: Well, when I went back, I actually finished high school and took some college classes at night, because I was pretty sure I wanted to become a lawyer. I also took more English. And I also worked. I was working in a hotel, and I was working as a travel agent dealing with the tours

as well as the reservations of tickets. It was nice to practice my English and to conduct the city tours. And I was living, actually, in Acapulco with one of my brothers.

LD: Okay.

EB: One of my older brothers. As you know in the Mexican culture it is customary in Mexico to have family kind of help each other, and our family is very close in that sense. The colleges in Mexico don't have actual dorms. I went to finish high school in Acapulco because in my home community we only had up to ninth grade. So I had to leave to go to preparatory school.

LD: And how far away was Las Mesas from Acapulco?

EB: About, oh, probably an hour and a half, because of the roads. They are so wavy up to the mountains. But if you were to be in a place like Minnesota, it was probably forty minutes.

LD: Okay.

EB: But it took longer because of the road conditions.

LD: So from the point when you were, you know, a pretty young woman, you were kind of independent.

EB: Yes. Actually, my secondary school did not take place in Las Mesas, it took place in Ayutla. So at sixth grade I left my hometown and lived with an aunt in Ayutla. Again, we did have up to ninth grade in Las Mesas, but in the school system of Las Mesas, the teachers were always on strike.

LD: Oh, I see.

EB: So my father sent all of us to the next community, which was like an hour away, We went to Ayutla, to an aunt that we lived with.

LD: Wow.

EB: So all of us (my brothers and sisters) actually left our community in the sixth grade.

LD: Tell me a little bit about after that. You were going to school at night and working. And what did you do? Did you finish college in Mexico?

EB: No. No.

LD: Okay.

EB: I did not finish college in Mexico, I finished college after I got married. I met my husband when I was a foreign exchange student and we kept in touch after I went back to Mexico. My husband's name is Mark Bruggeman.

LD: Oh, my goodness.

EB: Yes. We met in Sleepy Eye, and then he went back and forth to Mexico. We got married in Mexico and then came back. I finished my college here at Mankato.

LD: Oh, wow.

EB: Mankato State University.

LD: That's quite a love story.

EB: Yes. [Chuckles]

LD: That you met at sixteen.

EB: Yes.

LD: How old were you when you came to Minnesota, when you came back permanently?

EB: To live? I was nineteen.

LD: Nineteen.

EB: Yes.

LD: And you went to Mankato State, you said.

EB: Yes. It's Minnesota State University-Mankato now. When we got married, we moved back here. And then I started working in a factory, a calendar factory in Sleepy Eye. It's now called Norwood, and at that time I think it was called AUI. They made calendars, so I was counting calendars. After I was there for six months I told my husband, "you know, my dream has not been to be counting calendars all my life. I want to do something else." And we both decided—because he wasn't finished with college either—we both decided that we were going to go to school at night. He was working at Del Monte Corporation.

LD: Yes.

EB: And I was working at Norwood, AUI at that time. So we actually both finished college by taking night classes.

LD: Wow. And how long did that take?

EB: I didn't graduate until 1985 with my Bachelor's. I started going in 1979, so in between there, we had two kids. [Chuckles]

LD: Ah. And tell me the names of your kids.

EB: My oldest daughter is Vanessa and my second one is Erica. And then we had our son William and our daughter Brianna, who is the youngest.

LD: Beautiful names.

EB: Oh, when I enrolled at college I met a woman by the name of Maria Wellman, who used to work with the Minnesota Migrant Program.

LD: Yes.

EB: When I met her, I had started first at a vocational school. I didn't go to Mankato State the first year, I went to a technical college.

LD: Oh, okay.

EB: I went to a technical college because I told my husband, I need to learn more English if I'm going to go on to a 4 year university. We didn't want to spend a year on tuition at the university level, so instead I went to a technical college for a year and I took the secretarial shorthand program. It was less tuition and at the same time, too, they had some intensive English classes.

It was at Mankato Technical Institute where I met this woman, Maria Wellman—who has now passed away—who used to work with the Migrant Council. At that time, I wasn't really looking at going to college right away because my husband and I needed to work. However, Maria Wellman approach me to go on to college. She said, "Well, what have you done in the past?" And prior to working at Norwood, I did work walking beans and also at Del Monte, and I had just moved to Minnesota. She said, "Well, you probably would qualify for some programs under the migrant farm workers program." And then I told her, "my father came all the time with the *Bracero* Program." My husband was also working at Del Monte, so we had that income and I did qualify for the migrant program for a year to start college and to help me out with college expenses.

LD: Like a grant?

EB: Yes, and especially this grant was going to help with the expenses of commuting back and forth from Sleepy Eye and Mankato.

LD: Sure.

EB: It wasn't very much money, but it did help with the transportation and the food and part of the tuition at the technical college.

LD: Okay.

EB: I don't think I could have done it without that program.

LD: And how long did you participate in that program?

EB: For a year.

LD: Just the first year.

EB: Yes, for a year.

LD: And when you started college, what did you want to do?

EB: When I started college, as I said, I always wanted to be a lawyer. And I knew that to be able to do that I would have to come up to the Twin Cities, and it wasn't feasible then. So I went into the business area, which is what I entered at Mankato State University. But once I entered there, I actually tested out of all my Spanish classes, because I already had some of my Spanish literature and all of my Spanish grammar classes - I had those in Mexico.

LD: Sure.

EB: So then I had all those credits, and I decided to also go into education. I was taking the business classes for the international business area, and also the education to become a Spanish teacher. Eventually I finished with a degree in Business Education--grades 7-12, and Spanish 7-12, with a minor in International Business, and also a concentration in Ethnic Studies.

LD: Wow.

EB: I switched to education, especially Spanish, because I knew that in our community and in surrounding communities there was a need for ESL [English as a Second Language] teachers and there was a need for Spanish teachers. I decided that I wasn't a single student, but I was already settled in the area; therefore, teaching Spanish was a good choice to get a job in the community. So I pursued a career in education.

LD: Because you saw the need and you saw yourself kind of filling that need.

EB: Yes.

LD: And so, that's amazing. So you're working, you're raising two babies, and you're going to school. And you graduated in 1985, you said.

EB: 1985, yes.

LD: What did you start doing? You started teaching?

EB: Yes. When I graduated, right away I got a position with Saint James Public Schools. But prior to that, actually, during my last year at Mankato, the community college in Worthington contacted Mankato State University because they needed someone to teach some Spanish classes at the college level. So because I was so close to finishing the program—this was during the spring and I graduated during that summer—the university recommended me to teach Spanish at Worthington Community College-- a night class.

LD: Oh.

EB: So I worked at Worthington for about a year and a half teaching night classes. Later on, in August, right after I got my degree, I was recommended to go over to Saint James Public Schools because they had an ad for a Spanish teacher. I was employed by Saint James Public Schools to teach Spanish. The position was shared with Butterfield and Mountain Lake, so I'd travel from Saint James to Butterfield and to Mountain Lake the first year.

LD: Wow.

EB: And then the second year the program grew, so I only traveled between Saint James and Butterfield. And by the third year, the program grew so much that I only was employed at Saint James.

LD: Wow. So you saw quite a growth from when you had first come when you were fifteen.

EB: Yes.

LD: But even in those first three years, you wanted to get into the changes in the community. But first, tell me what being a young teacher was like.

EB: Oh, it was interesting and good. And remember, at that time even though I was a young teacher, and new to the profession, I was much older than the normal teacher.

LD: Sure.

EB: With children and a husband.

LD: Yes.

EB: So, although I think that many young teachers are mature, I had experience teaching at the college level. And when I was a student at Mankato State University, I volunteered to help at the Children's House teaching Spanish to pre-Kindergarteners. I had good mentoring

LD: Sure.

EB: I connected with the professors very well, and they were also mentoring me as a teacher. I think that in the teaching profession sometimes we miss mentoring new teachers.

Teaching in Spanish, for example, was a source of pride for me, because it is important to teach language and culture. I used the language by speaking Spanish in the classroom, but also the culture so students were familiar with the culture and traditions as well as a background of the Latino people. I also did start teaching some night classes for ESL, because in Saint James we had a lot of Hispanic students.

LD: Yes.

EB: At that time, there was not a developed ESL program at St. James Public Schools, and I was helping Latino students with their English after school. I was getting home quite late some nights, but I had such a good husband who always helped me with the kids and with supper, and that was great! [Chuckles] So in talking about my experience as a teacher, I had an excellent experience. Being able to help some of the Latino kids in the school with their English gave me a great satisfaction, and being able to assist them with some of their homework in order to be successful was wonderful!

LD: So tell me . . . I'm torn between two. I want to hear about the growth of the community, but maybe it's better to reflect on that after. Because I want to know then how did you move on? Because you eventually became principal.

EB: Yes.

LD: Tell me a little bit about that journey.

EB: When I was teaching at Saint James, I decided to do my Master's program. I went back to Mankato, and while teaching, I took some night classes. So I did my Master's in Spanish Literature and Culture. I finished, and while I was still teaching at Saint James, I felt that I could make a difference in education if I actually became an administrator. I had so many ideas about how we could help students. As a teacher, your hands are tied in developing educational programs. As a principal you have more flexibility with program development in order to increase academic achievement, and parental involvement. As an administrator, you can do a little bit more to develop things that are needed in the school and community.

LD: Sure.

EB: I decided then to pursue a career in Educational Leadership--School Administration, and at that time it was a Six-Year Certification program. I went back to school, I started night classes again, and now I had a third child. [Laughter] And, you know, I went to Mankato, back and forth. Prior to finishing the program, I was contacted by the Sleepy Eye School that there was a position open as a Dean of Students.

So then I left, let's see, in 1996. That's when my fourth child, my daughter Brianna was born. I actually took a leave of absence after she was born. And that's when the position became available in Sleepy Eye. I decided then to apply for the position, was interviewed, and I was hired as the Dean of Students.

LD: Wow.

EB: So it was great to be hired by Sleepy Eye Public Schools; I was now back home, back to my community. It was a community that at that time had about ten percent Hispanic students in the district, grades K-12.

LD: Yes.

EB: That was my home, and a year later, the position became open for a High School Principal. I applied, and then they moved me up as an Interim Principal. I actually finished up that degree within a year after I was hired and became the principal. I was there for ten years - from 1996 to 2006. Now, while I was there as a principal, I saw the community grow from ten percent Hispanic students to thirty-eight percent. Most of the students were migrant children. It was great for me to work with the population and develop programs. It was wonderful and challenging not just to work with the migrant population and the families, but also with the community. Sleepy Eye is a community with people of German background--all white, and as you know, when you have a massive influx of a minority group, it can be kind of scary for a community.

LD: Sure.

EB: I worked with the community, and worked with city leaders, and worked with the school administration, and families, to eventually become a community that embraced diversity.

LD: Yes.

EB: That was great for me to do.

LD: Yes, tell me more about that. What were some of those challenges on both sides? In the established community and for the folks who were newcomers to the town.

EB: Well, first, we saw a lot of the kids were not graduating, students were not prepared and many children did not speak English, you know. Migrant education has about a seventy percent dropout rate nationwide, I believe this is due to mobility of migrant families.

LD: Wow.

EB: And those are children that are moving from district to district, from state to state, from school to school facing challenges in our education system in the U.S., especially in Minnesota, we don't have a set curriculum statewide like Texas does. When the migrant families/children are moving, there is the lack of school records following them and many migrant students are

repeating subjects which they did not complete in previous school districts because of mobility . I became interested in following the migrant students, and to find ways to improve their education at Sleepy Eye Schools, so eventually, I applied for a federal grant to bring in a migrant program to Sleepy Eye Schools. We applied in the year 2000, and we got the grant in 2001. At the same time, we proposed being a Migrant Head Start site and we combined the migrant education federal grant with a migrant Head Start program at the state level. So during the summer we converted the school into a summer school, for six weeks, to serve everyone from babies up to twenty-one years old. We did work with migrant students and provided that missing curriculum that was needed for them to be ready in the fall to enter our school.

LD: Yes.

EB: And with this grant, we employed a lot of people from the community plus high school and college students. We had about eighty employees in this migrant summer program--with the Head Start program and K-12 migrant education program. We employed teachers, para-professionals, kitchen staff, bus chaperones, cleaning staff, outreach workers, office workers, tutors, people in charge of supervision, etc. For the community of Sleepy Eye, the migrant funds brought in employment and educational programs which helped students in the area of remediation and preparation in order to have success at school. However, I needed to go out into the community and explain about the migrant funding awarded to the school because part of the community was saying that we were operating the summer programs with the funding that we generated during the school year, and some community members commented we were spending all the money on the migrant children. That was a challenge that we needed to face so I developed PowerPoint presentations, and the finance director and I went into clubs, private organizations, the Chamber of Commerce, businesses, to explain how the funding was generated for the migrant program and how it was spent. As school administrators, we were also very creative in combining migrant funds with other grants to provide different types of programs for all students needed summer school.

Furthermore, we communicated to the community how the funding that the migrant students were generating during the school year was also helping the students overall in our community in other programs/classes--Hispanic students were bringing not just the regular state aid as they walked into the building, but they also were generating funding such as ESL, free and reduced meals, compensatory, integration funding, and of course, migrant education funding, etc. To make things more clear, if a child, a non-minority student in Sleepy Eye, was generating, let's say, five thousand dollars, a migrant student was generating probably about ten thousand dollars.

LD: Wow.

EB: So when we informed the community, it really changed the mindset of the community. And I didn't only give this type of presentation to community members but I also made presentations to the students at school, especially to juniors and seniors. I showed them how the classes that we added, such as the College in the Schools courses, the AP [advanced placement] classes, and the vocational program benefitted all of them because by having migrant students enrolled in these courses, we were able to be creative with the funding for these programs. Overall, we were able

to offer small AP class sizes with only five students by being creative with funding which might not be otherwise offered.

LD: Wow.

EB: So then when the parents and community were aware, they started to appreciate more our migrant population and to embrace diversity. Furthermore, the citizens were also told about the economy in our community and the contributions of migrant parents to the economy -- migrant parents worked at Del Monte Corporation, Norwood--a calendar making factory, in the farms, nursing homes, etc.

LD: Right.

EB: If those companies go under because of the lack of workers, what is the unemployment going to be in the community? Where will a factory that employs people year round get its employees? Will Norwood survive as a business without the migrant population?

LD: Wow.

EB: The companies are surviving because they are employing the parents of migrant children. It was an interesting journey to work with the community, to talk about the economy, and to explain the funding sources for programs at school and how we needed the migrant students at our school in order to keep from merging with another school district.

LD: Yes.

EB: Sleepy Eye Schools would have been joined with another district because of not having enough students. And Sleepy Eye schools actually only had about forty-eight percent of the students population in the City of Sleepy Eye--there were two private schools also: Saint Mary's Catholic School, K-12, and Saint John's Lutheran School, K-8. So Sleepy Eye Public Schools hosted forty-eight percent of the student population.

LD: And how many students were there?

EB: In my building, I only had about four hundred fifty, which was grades 7-12. And in the elementary it maybe like about three hundred fifty. So you were talking at that time about eight hundred students. Right now, I think that the district probably only has maybe about six hundred students.

LD: And you mentioned that you made these presentations to the students themselves. We were talking about some of the tensions within the community. Was there tension within the school itself? Was there tension between students?

EB: There was at first, and then we brought in some programs that helped ease the tension among the students dealing with embracing race and diversity . And if you actually go to Sleepy

Eye School now, you will see how everyone is getting along and it is a great environment. Different programs and strategies were created within the school, including staff development and community partnerships; we make sure that we were talking about cultural competencies and cultural proficiency.

One example of a program that worked well in the school (I always talk about when I give presentations), was the Student Advisory committee. As you know, in most schools, there is a Student Council and some other student committees, the Student Council officers are chosen by popularity--which hardly any minority students were elected at Sleepy Eye High School. So by creating the Student Advisory committee for grades 7-12 (which I was the advisor of and was assisted by the Dean of Students), we had the opportunity to be very inclusive and train students on leadership skills. The composition of this committee included two minority students per grade level, the student council president, and the senior class president; we also brought in the student with the most records for missing school (attendance), most suspensions, and also the one with the most police records--due to drugs, alcohol, or whatever reason. We needed to teach these students to be role models, we needed to empower them to have leadership skills, and turn things around. This Student Advisory committee was in charge of the Student Handbook. That's such a powerful tool to be in charge of in order to provide input on school rules and regulations. Furthermore, this committee was also involved in assisting in the development of programming.

LD: Yes. Really.

EB: We started talking about the needs of the district by seeking student input, it was the students talking to each other on ideas for improving (student's perspective) the Student Handbook or programs. For example, if we wanted to improve students attendance at school, we gather information from students that were absent from school. We analyzed the problem and provided the committee with training to take the leadership in turning around the kids who were being absent--students talking to students. Some comments being said by some students who had an addiction (alcohol or drugs) were "Well, I need to get some help, and if he (a member of the committee) can be on that committee, and it's actually an important committee, so can I!" You know, things had started turning around, and students started to get along. We brought in mentoring programs with participation from the business community; we provided training in the area of mentoring for the high school football team (and other sports teams) to mentor some selected elementary and junior high students-- by the way, the football team had a lot of the Hispanic kids.

I will tell you, sports teams are a very important part of the school and community--it is such a powerful tool to have to bring parental involvement, and also for the *community* to really see what all kids can do together and be proud of, sports and other co-curricular activities are so important!

LD: Yes.

EB: When you win a state championship, and some of your leaders on that football team are minority students, that community is going to come around, you know. [Chuckles]

LD: Yes, yes, yes. How did you involve them into the sports?

EB: Well, a lot of the reasons why the kids were not going out for extracurricular activities, was because the physical was too expensive to pay, and they could not pay for the athletic fees. And also, too, they had to take care of their siblings. So it took a lot of talking to parents about the importance of their students to be involved in school activities, and on how important it was to retain their culture and language, but also equally important was the fact that if their children were going to be going to schools in Minnesota or the U.S., they needed to take a look at what their children needed to do to be part of the main culture in the community they were living. We can't keep our children isolated and need to participate in school activities.

LD: Yes.

EB: In order to help out the families were high school students were taking care of their siblings, we started to ask the churches to provide some babysitting funds for families for the students that were involved in sports. Some parents had jobs but their earnings was not enough to pay for babysitting--yet other families relied on other family members and friends.

LD: Right.

EB: Also, I asked the school board to allow for every student across the board who would qualify for free and reduced meals to be able to participate in extra-curricular activities free of charge. The school board made that rule possible, and then things were more accessible to the students because most of our Hispanic students qualify for free and reduced meals. So they didn't have to pay for the fee. And then, we needed to find a way to pay for the sports physical.

LD: Yes.

EB: Most of the Latino students were migrant students and qualified for the migrant program; so I approached the doctors at the clinic and I asked them to help. One of the things that I said, "we are so good as a country to go out to other countries to bring aid to people who are in poverty. But we have poverty in our own community and our own country."

LD: Yes.

EB: I asked, What about teaming together and providing some checkups for our migrant school students for free? We--the school-- will provide in writing verification of this service provided so you can use this document for your taxes. We also approached the dentists in the community with the same concept to provide some free dental checkups for migrant students. This request was granted and now it still goes on.

LD: Wow.

EB: So then every student who was a migrant received a free checkups. I printed out the Minnesota High School League form that students needed to play sports in order for the physicians to sign. I collected the forms and the beginning of the school year, when the school had started, I presented the form to the coaches. I met with the students and indicated to them that they had physical in place, to go out for football, go out for volleyball, go out for tennis, whatever you want to do. The sports fees were waived, the sports physical was completed--the coaches were so happy since there was a lack of student participation. And some of the comments were "oh boy, do we have a *team!*" It's best to keep those kids involved in extracurricular activities; research shows that there is a correlation among extra-curricular activities and academics--students perform better in their subject areas.

LD: Yes. Now do you think that having you, a Mexican immigrant yourself, as the Principal of the school, do you think that impacted the students, as well as the community?

EB: Perhaps, I could communicate with them in their first language. I think that it impacted the students to have a role model with the same background as them--I always talked to them about my family being migrant workers, how I got to be a Principal, and how I did work in the fields. And also, too, I think that impacted the parents, because I could speak the language.

LD: Sure.

EB: One of the groups I met with once a month were Hispanic mothers. Many of them were single mothers, and many of them were very young mothers. I talked to them about how the educational system works in this country and trained them on how to navigate the system at school. We talked about parental involvement and how it is that they could be more connected to the school. I started a folklore dancing group, and I taught any student in the school who wanted to join. Most of the students who joined were from the elementary. The Latino parents sewed the dresses for the group and got involved in supervising this activity.

LD: Oh.

EB: Many Latino parents know how to sew.

LD: Sure.

EB: I provided some sewing machines--got some swing machines to use from friends in the community, and the dresses were made for all the kids. It was good for all the parents involved to actually see the kids learn folklore dancing, it was an activity that integrated students. For non-Latino students to learn about other culture, and for Latino students to learn about their own culture.

LD: Yes.

EB: This group made a difference in the school and community. On *Cinco de Mayo* the students put on a program, and I made sure that the cafeteria had all Mexican food, with recipes that were

given by the families. Latino families would feel comfortable to come to school and they also will volunteer to read in the classroom--in Spanish, of course, if they could not speak English

LD: Yes.

EB: It's one thing that I always told the students: Spanish is your first language and you need to be proud of and you also need to learn to read and write Spanish. We had a class that was Spanish for Hispanics. I convinced the board that some of our kids were not doing well because their first language was not developed. Many of the students from Texas, they spoke Spanish, but they did not know the academic part of the language. Therefore they could not transfer the academic skills to the English language and were not learning English as fast as were expecting

LD: Right.

EB: It was the same thing with their English skills. Students were missing the academic part of the English language. The board went ahead and gave me the okay to start this class--Spanish for Hispanics. We taught them how to write and read in their first language; we saw how this group of 8th grade students were passing the MCAs in reading.

LD: What is MCA?

EB: It's the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment, which are State tests.

LD: Right.

EB: The kids were making a connection from their first language and analyzing the English language, and they were learning English much faster. I always place myself as an example, when I came to the US I could hardly speak the language. Within six months I was dreaming in English.

I learned English in one year. But my first language was developed, because I went to school in Mexico. Look at what happens to foreign exchange students. When they come here, they come to develop the skill in the English language, whether they are coming from Germany or Italy, etc, they come to develop their academic skills and their first language is already developed. So when they leave our schools after being here-- in the US--for one year as foreign exchange students, they speak better English than our ESL kids right now.

LD: Actually, this reminds me of something you said earlier, and going back to what your father had said about you're going to go, not as a migrant child, but as a foreign exchange student. And you said there was a big difference.

EB: Yes.

LD: Tell me a little bit more about that.

EB: Well, I pride myself on how I was treated when I was in the school as a foreign exchange student and all the attention I was given.

LD: Yes.

EB: And if you really look overall at the contrast on how we treat foreign exchange students vs. how we treat our own ESL students in our school and communities, there is a big difference!

LD: Yes.

EB: ESL students, in many instances, are suffering sometimes from racism, discrimination, when the foreign exchange students are not.

LD: What do you think that's about?

EB: Perhaps it could be about socioeconomic classes; I came from a poor family; however, I came into school in the U. S. as part of a foreign exchange student program, so people at school did not know my background.

LD: Yes.

EB: And students who come here as foreign exchange students are more likely to be better off financially in their home country than our migrant families, per se.

LD: Sure.

EB: For me to be part of the foreign exchange student program, my family had to borrow money. And my older brothers and sisters were working and contributed together for me to come.

LD: Yes.

EB: We definitely need to develop more programs to increase student achievement in our ESL programs. We need for schools to embrace them, and we need communities to embrace diversity.

LD: Yes.

EB: Many times when children don't want to come to school, they are absent because they are not welcomed in the school. When I spoke previously about the group of students who were involved in the Advisory Committee and in charge of the handbook, it was about providing self-esteem, about providing leadership. And also for me, as the school Principal, it give me the opportunity to ask them, and for them to tell me what we needed to do in the classroom and at school overall to improve our school environment and for everyone to get along and be welcome.

LD: Yes.

EB: Keep in mind that the Student Advisory Committee was just not the minority students, it had non-minority members also. Plus, the student council and the senior class president were also part of this committee--we needed input from everybody.

LD: Yes.

EB: So there were a few programs that we put together in the district, like an after school program and the summer programs, for which we really combined a lot of funding to make them work. There was the international club, and the Spanish club. And also, too, we had a soccer program as part of targeted services which was combined with an after school class where the kids had the chance to be involved in playing soccer, but yet spend an hour to do some reading or writing in English. Programs like this were combine to benefit students through grants.

LD: Yes.

EB: We brought in a curriculum on diversity (grant) also; this curriculum was placed in the social studies classes for a whole year. It wasn't just about class on cultural diversity or ethnic diversity, but it was also diversity to deal with lesbian and with gay issues and it focused on "peace". Because, let's face it, in a small community we need to teach about diversity overall. We needed to make sure that students needed to be respectful of every kind of diversity. It was a good curriculum.

LD: You mentioned you had that tremendous growth from ten percent to thirty-eight percent of Hispanic students. And you mentioned that that kind of helped keep the school open.

EB: Yes.

LD: What were some of the other contributions that the students made to the school but that also their parents made to the community? What were some of the contributions that you saw?

EB: Well, I think that, for the parents, for example, they volunteer a lot into the community, especially in the churches. But I think the economic contribution was actually tremendous, because those people are the ones who actually do the shopping in the community; they don't go too far. So they keep our clothing store and our grocery stores open.

LD: Yes.

EB: Until now, then Wall-Mart came around Sleepy Eye-- in New Ulm, which is around the area. But shopping locally was a big contribution by the Latino community, and not only that, as I mentioned before, parents were part of the workforce for Del Monte and Norwood. Also in Sleepy Eye there are a lot of farms, and these migrant families are the ones who walk the beans and pick up the rocks. Sleepy Eye is also known for a lot of pigs and corn in the area--Christensen Farms.

LD: Yes.

EB: So there are families who work with the hog production, others in the canning factory; there were jobs that many of the natives from Sleepy Eye didn't care to do. And it was those migrant families who were doing the jobs. That's probably the reason they actually came into the community, because of all those jobs that were available and that kept the community going. During hard economic times, the town of Sleepy Eye did not lose many businesses and I believe it is because of the contribution that those people made. And as far as the students, we incorporated into the summer migrant program projects for the ESL and migrant students to do.

Some students were going to nursing homes to help out, others played cards with the elderly--I have some pictures and a PowerPoint showing how they volunteered during the migrant program. These were activities where we called to the attention of the newspapers, and show what great things Latino students were doing in the community, because in some instances the newspapers reported negative news.

LD: The negative things.

EB: Right.

LD: Yes, yes.

EB: They needed to report the good things that students were doing. So that's one thing we need to do--to make sure newspapers report the positive happening with minority students. With our folklore dancing, I think that we contributed not just to the community of Sleepy Eye, but we also performed at neighboring schools, and did mini-cultural workshops. In Sleepy Eye the integration funding came around--it was in 2002 when we were eligible to receive integration funding. We had a cultural center in the community where our outreach worker was Hispanic, and we kept the center open to the public for students whose parents were not home after school. Students could come in and do their homework. The center was used by the community, even by the other schools.

Integration programs benefit all students. This funding is part of Minnesota's Desegregation that requires schools and communities to work together to design effective, voluntary strategies for positive learning environments, focusing on closing the achievement gap. Even though the programs and funding are generated by protected students (minority students), in Sleepy Eye, these are the migrant and Latino students. Because of them, we were identified as a school that had over twenty percent of students of color and eligible to receive integration funding. We developed a plan and submitted it to the State. We created programs to help students with their assignments at the cultural center. We also had some cultural activities, and programs overall that embraced diversity and helped in student achievement. Once students were finished with their homework at the cultural center, we allowed them to play some games as their reward. [Chuckles]

LD: Yes, yes! [Chuckles]

EB: Oh! And popcorn. We made popcorn for them.

LD: So, in the midst of all this busyness, what was it like for you? I mean, you have four kids now. What were some of the challenges that you had? And what was it that kept moving you forward?

EB: Well, I think that I was making a difference. It was a year when, I think it was 2003-2004—I would have to check the record—but that year we, at Sleepy Eye Schools, achieved a one hundred percent graduation rate.

LD: Wow.

EB: And, to me, that was a reward.

LD: Yes.

EB: Yes. And you know, personally, I didn't quit the schooling yet, while I was working at Sleepy Eye I went back to school and I got my superintendent's degree.

LD: Oh. So during all this time you're still going to school?

EB: Yes. [Chuckles]

LD: Wow. And so when did you finish that degree?

EB: It was 2003. Also, I was certified as a Principal only for grades 7-12, so I went back and picked up the K-12 Principal licensure.

LD: Oh, wow.

EB: So I finished both degrees in 2003.

LD: What kept pushing you? Why did you keep going back? I mean, some people might say, "I'm principal. I'm doing well. You know, I have four kids, I'm very busy." What motivated you to keep going?

EB: As I said before, I think it was to make a difference. By now I was involved in different committees at the state level. In 2002, I became a board member for CLAC, the Chicano Latino Affairs Council, and I also participated in presentations across the state on improving the academic achievement of Latino students, and also presented at the national level about migrant education. And I saw the need, the need that exist especially with our Hispanic population. As I mentioned before, there is a seventy percent dropout rate with migrant education, and most of them are Hispanic children. And also the pregnancy rate with our Latino girls, the dropout rate once students reach ninth grade. So I needed to do more research and find out more about

programs and develop more strategies to help with our Latino students. I think that we have a crisis.

LD: Talk to me a little more about that crisis. What is the crisis nationwide like and what is it here like in Minnesota?

EB: I believe that definitely nationwide, when it comes to migrant education, we need to develop a better system to follow the students. We had a system in Sleepy Eye where we kept in touch with the schools where the students were coming from, communications made a difference. We were working with the curriculum in Sleepy Eye, not just for state testing--MCA's in Minnesota, but also with the Texas tests. The tests were - at that time - the Texas Assessment of Knowledge Skills. So we wanted to prepare students for either tests. As a principal, I was calling principals in the schools in Texas to see what help we needed to provide for migrant students for their graduation plan. Texas has a state curriculum, and the schools I called had three plans--Minimum Plan, recommended Plan, and Distinguished Achievement Plan. So we were working with the highest plan to prepare the students; we didn't know if they were going to graduate from Minnesota or from Texas.

We were also working with the University of Houston through online learning to provide some of the curriculum for the students. This made the difference in graduating students from high school.

LD: Yes.

EB: I think that in Minnesota, too, we definitely need to make personal learning plans for all students, we need to make it a priority to educate all children. And when it comes to the Hispanic children, there is mobility, there is poverty, there are language barriers -- we need to open our doors to Latino parents. Staff development needs to happen. We need to bring in more educational programs at each school to closed the achievement gap. It can be achieved. I did it in Sleepy Eye. It is hard work and we definitely need to prepare all students. I've seen the statistics now, and it isn't just our minority children, but even the percentage of our non-minority students is declining in high school graduation. According to some 2009 data I have seen from the MN State Demographer (percent of 9th graders who will graduate within 5 years) it's projected that overall we're only going to reach around eighty percent or less of high school graduates! I mean, that's for Minnesota. That's not good.

LD: Eighty percent graduation rate?

EB: Graduation rate.

LD: Wow.

EB: It is alarming that in Minnesota we're looking at eighty percent or less *overall*. Hispanics probably do not even make up twenty percent! But we need to work hard; we need to work with

programs that involve more parental involvement and post-secondary and business/community partnerships because the schools cannot do it alone.

LD: Yes.

EB: You know, there is a saying that it takes a whole village to raise a child. I am a real believer in that. The schools can work together with our communities, again we have to form partnerships with businesses, with universities, with other organizations, with churches. We need to make sure we are involving families.

LD: You were just saying that we have eighty percent graduation rate in Minnesota and then Hispanics, you said something, twenty percent?

EB: No, I'm saying that it is predicted that overall it's going to be only about eighty percent or less of the high school students that will be graduating from Minnesota.

LD: And then so in the Hispanic Latino students?

EB: It's much, much lower.

LD: How much, do you think?

EB: I am thinking it is about 20%; however, let me check what it is and you'll get the figures for sure.

LD: Sure. Okay.

EB: Actually, I can give you a copy of the PowerPoint from the State Demographer. And other information I have from the state about the MCA's and TEAE tests for ESL students.

LD: Yes.

EB: Many of the ESL students in this data are the Hispanic students. When it comes to the TEAE reading test at the high school level for ESL students, we're not even at the twentieth percentile.

LD: Oh, my.

EB: And when it comes to the ESL writing at the high school level, we're not even to the fortieth percentile. Again, overall for ESL students in the state.

LD: Wait. Forty percent?

EB: For the writing.

LD: So forty percent of where they should be?

EB: Of one hundred percent. Right.

LD: Okay.

EB: We're not even at the fortieth percentile for the writing area for ESL students in grades 9-12th in the state of MN.

LD: I see.

EB: At the elementary level ESL students do better; it goes up and down per grade. So that's alarming.

LD: Yes.

EB: Again, we have a lot of work to do. And definitely we have to take a look at best practices. We need to look at schools that are achieving. We need to replicate those best practices, so we can help students achieve. I am interested in the academic achievement of all students but particularly interested in the Latino population because they have the largest dropout rate in Minnesota.

LD: I want to go back to some of these achievement gaps. I want to go back to the achievement gaps in just a moment. But you finished as principal in Sleepy Eye in 2006, correct?

EB: Right.

LD: Okay. So what did you do after that? And why did you leave?

EB: I took a leave of absence. And I took a leave of absence to work on my doctoral program. I went over to Minnesota State University-Mankato. Actually, I joined the Education Leadership Department and I taught classes in the area of curriculum supervision for people studying to become principals. I also had a cohort of sixteen aspiring principals in the metro area. And one interesting thing, there aren't many minority Hispanics going into those positions, and I think that's where we can make a difference, having minority teachers going into school administration.

While at Minnesota State University-Mankato, at the same time, I was working at Shattuck-Saint Mary's--which is a private school in Faribault, Minnesota where I started working as a department chair in the world language department; they were in need of bringing somebody in to help them to bring back their world languages classes, including the ESL program. My son was going to school there. Shattuck is well known for hockey and my son played hockey. He went over there in ninth grade. And then a year later, I joined the staff. This was a good opportunity for me to work for a private school over my three-year leave of absence.

Shattuck-Saint Mary's is one of the best private schools that we have in Minnesota and I believe in this country. I thought, I want to see what student programs they have to be one of the best. After being the world language department chair for two years, I became their academic dean also till I left.

LD: Yes.

EB: So I did that for a year at Shattuck-St. Mary's. Shattuck is a preparatory school that has a lot of international students, so their ESL program is very large and based on the international student population. As I mentioned before, it is important for ESL students to have their first language developed and the international students at Shattuck did--which made it easier for them to learn English fast. For many Hispanic students in MN, their first language is not developed, (which is also true for many ESL students in our public schools) so it makes it harder for them to become English proficient. I oversaw the ESL program under the world language department, it was an excellent program with very dedicated staff. When I go and speak, I talk about this program which aimed at passing the TOEFL test--I think that if we could replicate this model, students in our public schools would do much better.

LD: Oh.

EB: The TOEFL test is the test that you must take for international students to get into a college or university.

LD: Right.

EB: Well, if we can have our students proficient in English when they finish high school, they'll be okay at the university level! [Chuckles]

LD: Right, right.

EB: The curriculum that the ESL program at Shattuck has, involved some classes for ESL social studies, and we were looking into Science ESL. These two areas have lots of reading. English grammar and classes in math are more universal.

LD: Yes.

EB: When I was the principal at Sleepy Eye, I saw that ESL students were having a hard time in the science area due to the fact that in science there's a lot of new vocabulary. Even the native English speaking students had a difficult time in science. For our ESL students in science, lesson plans were shared days before with the ESL teacher to prepare students for the upcoming science vocabulary. ESL students were grouped for science labs and they were provided a para-professional to assist the science teacher.

LD: Yes.

EB: Again, having the ESL teacher communicate and work with the science teacher to prepare the students for their science classes helped. And you know, nowadays, we're really not attracting too many students of color into the science area, and especially STEM. And if you really think about it, that's where a lot of the jobs are at this point in time. So my mission is to encourage students of color into STEM.

LD: Which is science, technology, engineering and math [STEM].

EB: Yes.

LD: Okay.

EB: Anyway, I was at Shattuck for four years and while there, I was also working at Minnesota State University-Mankato. I was teaching night classes. I worked at MNSU for one and a half years, until I finally said, I am not Superwoman.

LD: [Laughs]

EB: I can't have the full time position at Shattuck and teach classes at MNSU. When I became the academic dean at Shattuck, it was more responsibility and administration. So then I let the position at MNSU go. I do visit the university and speak once in a while there. I would visit and do some lectures and also speak for some of the classes. But the most rewarding and fun time about working with MNSU-Mankato, which I do miss, was working with aspiring principals.

As I worked with aspiring principals, I had the opportunity to analyze and share some data with them on where we are with the ESL population or with the minority students, and things that they could do to better their programs as they became principals. So I think that when I retire from this position, that's where I'm going to head. I will move towards working for a university, working with programs where you're training principals. I think that that's my last goal, while I am in education. [Chuckles]

LD: And then you'll go and rule the world. [Laughs] And then you'll become an international lawyer. [Laughter]

EB: I don't know about that. [Laughs]

LD: No, I'm glad to hear you say that you realized you weren't Superwoman, because what you've done is really amazing.

EB: [Chuckles]

LD: All that you've accomplished while you're raising kids, while you are, you know, responsible for all this. So, glad to know you're human. [Laughs]

EB: Yes. You know, I have to say though, too, that while I raised my kids I had much support from husband and his family. I had a sister [Delen] who came and lived with me while she attended high school.

LD: Ah.

EB: So it kind of helped me to have a sibling here.

LD: Sure.

EB: As you know, in our culture we always help each other.

LD: Yes.

EB: And then while my sister Delen attended the university, I also had a brother [Jose Guadalupe] that came and lived with us when my son was younger. And then another sister [Ledi] came. These siblings came throughout the years and lived with us for a year or two, to learn English.

LD: Yes.

EB: And this is an example, as I mentioned before, how in the Mexican culture, we always help each other.

LD: Yes.

EB: Instead of going through a program, we--my husband and I--brought them directly to us, in our home. And it was better for me, because then I had a sibling, with me.

LD: Yes.

EB: I had family.

LD: Yes, yes. That's so funny, too, that I know your sister Delen and I didn't know you guys were related!

EB: Yes.

LD: So then, from there, from Shattuck-Saint Mary's - is that when you came here to NWS?

EB: Yes. While at Shattuck, I enjoyed being the Academic Dean. Shattuck is a wonderful private school; the campus is beautiful, and they offer excellent programs. However I decided to leave this past summer. I came to NWS in August.

LD: In August of this year?

EB: 2010.

LD: 2010. Oh, so very recently.

EB: Yes.

LD: So tell me about this position now and what you do here and why you came.

EB: I love the position at Northwest Suburban; my title is Director of Educational Services. One of the reasons I enjoy my job is because I enjoy developing programs leading to integrating best practices for student achievement. I believe in the planning, we staff at NWS, are doing to assist our member districts and families in order to further improve our existing programs. I like to seek new opportunities for collaboration around desegregation efforts through coordination of our existing programs. We serve as a resource for professional development and facilitate opportunities for parents to become engaged, familiar, and build understanding of our educational system in order to help their students. Furthermore, it has been fun and interesting to seek opportunities for partnerships with various colleges and universities.

LD: Wow.

EB: I feel that with my background in public and private education, I could do a better job at working with programs for students who are at risk, who are not achieving, especially Latino students. And I really felt that I needed to go back into the public school system and make a difference, especially for our Latino community--public schools is where most of them are enrolled. So I took this position; I believe in integration and the collaboration among the member districts. I like the programs the district offers focusing on creating culturally inclusive learning environments in order to increase student achievement.

LD: Yes.

EB: We must make sure student achievement is taking place within our programs such as Jobs for American Graduates (JAG)-- which is offered mainly to juniors and seniors and targets the bottom twenty-five percentile of those students in schools. The program covers thirty seven competencies, and involves much data collection. Advancement Via Individual Determination [AVID] is another NWS program which targets the middle 50% of students and provides support and encouragement to students in order to take rigorous coursework through its curriculum and tutorial, especially minority students. Many AVID students are prepared to enroll in Advanced Placement [AP] and college courses in their high schools in order to be prepared for college. Then we have Future Educators Club, which is working with students providing opportunities in job shadowing, etc. in order to encourage them to study a career in education. Our Magnet School programs which are coordinated by NWS are of high rigor and they follow three thematic areas--Visual and Performing Arts, International Baccalaureate, and STEM. Other programs such as the Multicultural Resource Center and our Family and Community Empowerment benefit school staff and families

When I was in Sleepy Eye, we also had integration funding; we had a collaborative there also so I was familiar with the funding. When this position opened, I thought, what a great position it would be to actually work for the northwest part of the metro area, assist in programming, and make a difference.

LD: Yes.

EB: That's what attracted me to this position. Right now, for example, we're looking at programs where we can work with parents - especially immigrant, and minority parents. Providing some workshops to them in the area of school graduation and integration as I did in Sleepy Eye. Getting them familiar with the school, teaching them about how the educational system works in Minnesota, and also to become familiar with state testing. Teaching them about parenting the children, and how to get connected with the school, because they can make a difference in the education of their student in order to facilitate student achievement. Also, it is great working with teachers, administration, and the overall staff, bringing them different types of workshops to enrich the classrooms--programs that are a two- or three-year commitment and involves partnerships with other organizations such as differentiating instruction for ESL students, and absent narratives--through a partnership with the Minnesota Humanities Center.

LD: Yes.

EB: Absent narratives. You know, which will be professional development for teachers designed to provide cultural awareness and teach the missing curriculum-- the culture of people of color, their lived experiences, etc., through stories in the area of art, music, history, etc. These absent narratives are left out of our main curriculum and it is important for all children to know the cultural background, experiences, and perspectives that make-up the students in the classroom. We're also talking about workshops in inquiry into science for students of color. We need more kids to go into those areas. We are also planning to offer some cultural workshops through the schools and we will start with the Latino culture, because we're having an influx of Hispanic students that is actually rather new to schools such as Elk River, Buffalo, Rockford, and Anoka. Some of our schools like Brooklyn Center or Fridley, and Osseo, they have had a few Latino students within this decade, the last ten years.

Again, in our other schools, we are growing in this area, and if I can make a difference in providing services to them, I think that the kids will be better off - the minority kids, the Hispanic kids. If we can mentor some of the teachers, and also work with administrators on best practices and provide my experience as what I have done in the past, I think that we can make a difference for the students.

LD: Let me think. You're so eloquent. [Chuckles] I have about like five questions and you answered them all in one.

EB: [Chuckles]

LD: Tell me some of the changes that you've seen. Well, first of all, so do you live here? Because Sleepy Eye, how far is Sleepy Eye from here?

EB: About two hours.

LD: So are you commuting?

EB: No.

LD: [Chuckles] Because?

EB: We bought a condominium in Minneapolis.

LD: Oh, okay. [Laughs] I was going to say, that's a really long commute.

EB: Yes, but my husband is still in Sleepy Eye. He lives in Sleepy Eye, and our home is in Sleepy Eye. I go home on weekends or he comes to Minneapolis.

LD: Oh, okay.

EB: Or he comes over here on weekends.

LD: Okay. And you don't have any more kids at home?

EB: We have one.

LD: You have one, okay.

EB: Yes. She's here with me, going to school here. And the other ones, oh, one is married. I have two grandchildren. As I say, one more coming, and actually any day. I'm hoping that he or she waits through the weekend! [Laughter] And then my daughter Vanessa is also here and my son is in college in Ohio.

LD: Congratulations on the upcoming baby!

EB: Oh, thank you.

LD: So what are some of the changes that you've seen? I guess really, I mean, you've been working here not as long as you had been working in Sleepy Eye, etcetera. So talk to me first about there. What are some of the big changes? Obviously, demographics. I mean, ten percent to thirty-eight percent Latino students in the schools, but what are some of the other changes that you've seen?

EB: I think that in Sleepy Eye what I have seen is that now, it's a community that embraces diversity. You know, that was a big change. And often I have been asked if this model can be replicated into areas of the Twin Cities, like Minneapolis, where we have so many students that dropout of school, especially with the Hispanic population. And I always say, we could replicate that model on a smaller scale if we really get involved with the churches.

One of the changes that I'm seeing right now from Sleepy Eye is that some districts are not tapping into partnerships with our community's resources. And we have to keep in mind that we, schools, can't do it alone. We really have to, you know, partner with the churches, with businesses. I have been on committees - I was part of the K-16 science standards committee. We had some people from business in this committee from the science industry. They would say, "You know, we haven't been asked by the schools to come in and partner." And I think that our business organizations as well as other community organizations are waiting for that. I do think, and hope that in some of our member districts, partnerships are happening.

LD: Yes.

EB: Keep in mind that we have eight districts. By looking at data from the state and our own data, we are seeing how students are doing. This is probably another trend that I have seen in education, along with the demographics, I think that we as schools are more inclined now to collect data and analyze the data to see how students are performing. I think that the programs are growing for our Hispanic students. They're certainly growing. You know, aside from the demographics, I think that I've seen, too, a lot of mobility, and that's with our undocumented students. There is a lot of mobility, and I think that if we could just teach families that if they just stay in one area their students will benefit a great deal, that in Minnesota every child has the right to go to school.

LD: Yes.

EB: The school has no right to ask you about your immigration status. And the more you settle in one area and have your students finish at a school, they do much better than moving. There is a correlation between mobility and dropping out of school for our Latino population. But you know, of course, along with that is the economics - the jobs that are out there for the parents. And the moving, the changes in housing, right now it is probably because of the economy. The impact is tremendous with families. Right now many of our families are going through hard times and so is our country and state.

LD: Right. I kind of want to wrap up, start to wrap up. Really, truly, you're so eloquent. [Chuckles] We've gone through so much in a relatively short amount of time. What are some satisfactions for you? Certainly, you've talked about some of them. But what are some of the things that have sustained you through being Superwoman and working many jobs and going to school? What are the things that you really hold onto, and that you're proud of?

EB: Well, I think the fact that, you know, I'm a person that has worked in the fields, I am an immigrant who believes that education certainly opens the door to success for anyone. I used to

share my story with many of our Latino community and Latino students, to show that they can do it. It's hard work. But they certainly can go ahead. With the right mentorship, we can certainly get our children through. Because we definitely - in our schools, we all are charged to mentor all our students.

There certainly are opportunities out there to do it. I think that also being part, for eight years, of the Chicano Latino Affairs Council, an agency that can introduce legislation, and actually must introduce bills and see that education is a must. We really can't turn our backs to our students. They are our future.

LD: Yes.

EB: Pretty soon, if we don't do that, we are going to be in a state where we are going to be not only bringing in goods from China, but also people. You know, we've got to educate all our students here so that our kids in Minnesota can take all those luxurious jobs of the future.

I think that what keeps me going is the fact that we have to work hard and we have to work together. You know, not just the school district community, but also as a state and provide the necessary resources that we need to graduate our kids from high school and move them on to post-secondary education and employment. We certainly don't want them to be out there on the streets, because when they are on the streets, they are turning to gangs.

LD: Yes.

EB: And a lot of times they turn to crime because they haven't found themselves and they don't have an adult mentor. We need to do a better job at mentoring our young people.

LD: One more question. [Chuckles] Like, I really could ask you many, many more.

EB: I must also say that also what keeps me going is, actually, my family and my husband. My husband, if I didn't have his support, I wouldn't be where I am.

LD: Sure, absolutely. Absolutely. I was going to say, I could ask you about a hundred more questions. [Laughter] I wish I had about five hours with you. But what are your hopes for the future? Personally, and as a member of the Latino community in Minnesota.

EB: I think that, personally, my hope for the future is, of course, is to be healthy. And someday, I keep telling my husband I am going to finish that doctoral program—which I haven't yet. And of course getting my children through all their schooling and again, living a healthy life. And someday return to Sleepy Eye! [Chuckles]

LD: You really love it there.

EB: Oh, yes. Yes. Someday I'll return to Sleepy Eye. And my hope for the Latino community is that it's not time to be alone, it's a time to pull our resources together and work together to educate our Hispanic children. Because we certainly cannot have this dropout rate.

LD: It makes you emotional.

EB: Yes. It's, it's too much.

LD: Tell me. Tell me why does it touch you so?

EB: [Pauses]

LD: We can take, we could pause if you want.

EB: Yes.

LD: Okay.

[Brief recording interruption]

LD: Okay, let me start again.

EB: I think that, you know, it is hard to see kids out there who drop out of school. Many of them are children raising children. There are so many Latino students who drop out in the ninth grade. They are getting married, having children. And I mean, then what is it that we're going to expect of them? Again, we have a long journey ahead of us in order for our Latino children to finish high school and to attend college. And also for them to have, certainly, a better life. As a Latino community we value our culture and we value our history. And we can lose track of that. We need to model our examples on those families that strive to have a better life. That is so important. Whether they remain in Minnesota or they go back to other states where it's warmer, it doesn't matter. The dropout rate is nationwide. And we certainly need to work with our Latino kids. They just have to have a better life.

LD: Yes. Yes, as I said, when I paused the recording, it's really heartening to see someone like you that has that kind of passion. Because I was one of those young Latino kids. And it's because of people like you, the passionate educators, that I was able to have a better life. So it is beyond the context of what we're doing.

EB: Yes.

LD: You know, I thank you for having that passion. Is there anything else that you want to talk about? We've covered a lot. [Chuckles]

EB: Yes, yes. I think that this project you guys are working hard to put together, as I told Jim [Fogerty] before, it's wonderful. Because by showing Latino students in the schools that there

are people with the same background as them who are successful, I think that you're going to get those students excited. We need to get this project into the school system, where kids need to learn that there are people out there with similar histories like them, who made it.

LD: Yes.

EB: Latino people who came from poverty, who came from working hard, whose parents immigrated and went through hard times and good times as they (students) are going through now.

LD: Yes.

EB: But as we say, "*Sí, se puede* [yes, we can]." They certainly can achieve! So I think that all your work is wonderful on behalf of our Latino children. And I do want to give you copies of the PowerPoint I have, and you can take a look, you know, with the data that I talked about.

LD: Absolutely. Well, on behalf of the Historical Society, once again, thank you so much. I know you're very, very busy. And this is a fantastic, fantastic interview, and truly a wonderful resource for those kids and for people who want to know about our community. So, really, I want to thank you so much.

EB: Yes. Thank you.

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