

## PERSONAL STATEMENT

As a mixed race Asian-American, I was raised in multicultural settings. Born to a family of high school graduates and military service members, I didn't have a guide for higher education.

From the moment I stepped into a K-12 classroom, I felt an intrinsic connection to the dynamics of education. My early experiences included cross-aged tutoring students from diverse linguistic backgrounds, during my high school years, which ignited a profound interest in working with diverse groups. These experiences, combined with my own educational journey, have influenced my commitment to pursuing the Master in Teaching program at Evergreen State College.

Being accepted into the AmeriCorps VISTA program was a life-changing experience. I learned so much about non-profits, anti-poverty work, & programs that support children & their families. It helped me grow in a profound way as I tried to make a small impact on my local community. During that time, I also received (UIR)Undoing Institutionalized Racism Training. In my role as MLK VISTA I had the opportunity to work at an early educational site, working with students who spoke a range of languages, including Spanish, Mandarin, and Arabic. It was here that I first observed the complexities of multilingual education while also feeling the familiarity of trying to translate for my own mother as a child (Korean is her first language). This experience was eye-opening. It highlighted for me the nuanced challenges faced by multilingual learners who are often proficient in content areas but may struggle with the language of instruction. I completed my service program with The American Friends Service Committee as Regional Indian Program Assistant and participated on the Native Arts & Crafts Law Committee further exposing me to local native culture.

I continued to work until I moved from Seattle, WA to Phoenix, AZ. That is where I entered another year of national service with Public Allies – in collaboration with AmeriCorps & the ASU Lodestar Center for Philanthropy and Nonprofit Innovation. I was placed with Valley of the Sun United Way. When I started, I worked in the Community Impact department focusing on issues to help end hunger & homelessness. I was a part of the team to implement a pilot program with The Siemer Institute. Upon completion of my service year, I was hired on to the Marketing department in a full-time position. Also, utilizing my education award I was able to complete my Bachelor of Science degree in Marketing as well as a certification in Project Management. I left that position after maternity leave and decided to become a stay-at-home parent for the foreseeable future.

Further into my journey, while serving as a Parent Volunteer in my children's schools, I had the opportunity to support a virtual classroom during the pandemic. It was an incredibly challenging time, for many reasons, as we learned to navigate how to teach kindergarteners through Zoom. I assisted with story times trying to use visuals such as pictures and puppets. The virtual classroom experience was characterized by a bit of frustration and disengagement, not due to lack of capability, but because most of the young students could not access the curriculum in a meaningful way. I was one of many volunteers who collaborated with ORLA teachers to implement activities and printed packets, in effort to improve participation.

My experiences were further enriched during my time as a Parent Volunteer with Centennial Elementary School here in Olympia, WA. Here, I observed the impact of an integrated multilingual approach on students' academic and social development. I saw how students thrived academically and socially when their linguistic backgrounds were acknowledged and leveraged as assets rather

than viewed as barriers. The positive outcomes for students in this environment are a testament to the effectiveness of integrated multilingual education. Both of my own children have had the great opportunity of being placed in Mrs. Laura Hendrix's Kindergarten class where she also teaches Spanish to her students. I've had the best experiences volunteering in the classroom for multiple teachers, school events & the booster club. Since 2021, I have assisted with 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade math, Kindergarten field trips, and more.

The challenges faced by multilingual learners often stem from a lack of understanding or insufficient resources rather than a lack of potential. This realization was further reinforced through my observations and interactions with educators and students alike. In my previous work experience with United Way, I learned how language barriers sometimes prevented parents from fully engaging with their children's education. Addressing these barriers through multilingual communication strategies and culturally responsive practices emerged as another area of critical need. This insight highlighted the broader scope of multilingual education, extending beyond the classroom to include family engagement and community support.

In conclusion, my journey through my own education, work, AmeriCorps service, becoming a parent & various educational settings has profoundly shaped my commitment to early education. Each experience has reinforced the need for specialized training and innovative strategies to support students & especially multilingual learners. I believe that the Integrated Multilingual Learner Pathway in Evergreen's Master in Teaching program will offer the tools and framework needed to transform these insights into actionable practices. I am eager to contribute to this field, armed with a deep understanding of the challenges and a passion for creating equitable educational opportunities for all students. I would like to participate in courses that would help continue my own education as well as provide a benefit to our community, to students.

Thank you for your consideration,

Sally Lopercio

Evergreen State College Applicant