

Claire Darmstadter

Hey, everybody! I'm joined today by Lola Hernandez, freshman at Madison Memorial High School in Madison. Thanks for taking a couple minutes to chat with me.

Lola Hernandez

Yeah, no problem.

Claire Darmstadter

Yeah. So first, I'd be great if you could just give us a really general overview of your educational and linguistic background.

Lola Hernandez

So I was born here in Madison, Wisconsin. My family's from Puerto Rico, so I speak Spanish fluently and understand it. And I guess I haven't really taken any Spanish classes or anything until this year, and I'm in like the DLI program at Memorial. And, yeah, that's about it. I did take French for a couple years in middle school. But yeah.

Claire Darmstadter

Yeah. And so most students that I know of being in the DLI program, they start when they're in kindergarten, when they're in first grade, but you actually, like you said, joined this year as a high schooler, which is a little bit different. So can you talk a little bit about what kind of that transition was like if it was hard to kind of join in after many of your friends, I would assume had been in the program a while. What was that kind of like?

Lola Hernandez

Yeah, so I guess at my school, we didn't have my middle school. We didn't have a DLI program. And we didn't, or maybe we did, actually. But I wasn't very aware of that. I think, actually, we did. So I guess the transition was kind of just like, I got an email asking if I wanted to be in the program, and I wasn't too sure about it. But then after talking to the principal and the leader of the program, I decided to join. So I didn't really — I knew a couple people who also happened to be in the program that weren't in it before. But I didn't really know anyone else in the program. And so I've met a couple people, and the transition has been pretty good. It's just taking two classes in Spanish. And yeah.

Claire Darmstadter

And would you say growing up Spanish was something you studied academically, where you ever were like, you know, writing papers and doing schoolwork ever in Spanish? Or was it kind of new where you might have spoken it at home, but now you'd got to formalize it with academic contexts and classes?

Lola Hernandez

Yeah, so I didn't really do much academics in Spanish, but like, I know how to write in Spanish. And I guess I grew up just like, I read in Spanish. And sometimes I write in Spanish, not that much, but like enough so that I know how to do it now.

Claire Darmstadter

And I know, in addition to being a member of the program, I think you're also involved in the DLI student group. So can you talk a little bit about what you do in that program? And kind of the reason why it exists?

Lola Hernandez

Yeah, so it started, I think it started like late December this year. Basically DLI at Memorial's like a new thing. And so the teacher, Mr. Luna, he was looking for, like student advice and stuff, like ways to make the program better. Just for students, especially in virtual learning. So he emailed a couple of us, I think there's seven of us, to see if we wanted to participate. And so now we meet every Wednesday. And basically, we go over, like what's happening in the program and our classes, what we like, how we can improve. And recently, we've been discussing how we can introduce more students to the program, especially middle school students that are coming like next year. And yeah, just how to, and we're also forming like, support groups for other students in the program who aren't necessarily like in this group that we have right now for like tutoring and stuff.

Claire Darmstadter

Yeah, it sounds like some really important and really cool work that you're part of. So I know like you said, you also participated in kind of like a run-of-the-mill normal French program in middle school. So do you feel like through that program, you enjoyed it? Was it effective at helping you learn language? Or how is that kind of compared to a DLI program?

Lola Hernandez

So I think in middle school for my French, I guess I did learn French obviously, I think I took it for I can't remember if it was two years or three, but the problem I think, the first year we took it and it was like basic introductory stuff. And then the second year, I feel like it was a lot of like repeating the same concepts that we learned. So I guess I didn't really learn that much in the program, besides just basic things and then towards the end of like, eighth grade, maybe like how to form sentences. But we didn't really learn that much other than that, and so in my DLI program, I think I like it better because first of all, I already know the level language. And so I'm able to, like expand my language, my vocabulary, and just overall like, like I'm learning more how to, like have conversations and interact in Spanish.

Claire Darmstadter

For sure. And I know that you've kind of considered a career that might involve language, but not necessarily one in education. So it can kind of talk about in the future any plans you might have, or ideas of how you can use your language skills.

Lola Hernandez

For like, when I said, I was considering, like, language options, maybe like, I'm not, I don't really think I want to do this, but maybe like, something that actually has to do with like studying like languages or like cultures, like other cultures, and I wanted to go to Spain, at least for like, an

exchange year or something, because I don't know, I really like Spanish and like Spanish culture. Overall, I think it's pretty different from like, American culture. And so I wanted to immerse myself in that. So that's kind of like what I was thinking.

Claire Darmstadter

And so you talked a little bit about culture. So kind of looking at Madison as a whole, or even just in different neighborhoods or different areas. Do you feel like Madison is generally supportive of people who speak more than one language or a non-English language? Or what's kind of the vibe you get from the community?

Lola Hernandez

I think Madison is pretty supportive, especially compared to other communities. It's pretty diverse. Like, I see a lot of people from like many different cultures in my schools in like, elementary school, middle school. So I have friends from different cultures, I think there's mostly support for people who speak more like main languages, I guess, like Chinese, Spanish, French, that type of stuff. But I think there's less support for students who might come from other countries where they speak like other languages. So yeah, but I still think Madison is pretty, like, supportive and I've had people and adults that have been there to support me through my like, language exploration.

Claire Darmstadter

And finally, we always tell little kids that they should view speaking more than one language as a superpower. So can you give me one reason, you can answer English and Spanish and it makes it both, why do you think speaking more than one language gives you a superpower?

Lola Hernandez

Being able to speak more than one language gives me a superpower because I can interact with people from around the world. And I can feel more comfortable with other people that also speak the same language. And, yeah, I'm just able to learn more about other people, which I find really fascinating.

Claire Darmstadter

Well so well said, thank you so much for chatting with me. I really appreciate your perspective and I think others will too. So I hope you have a great rest of your school year and thanks again!

Lola Hernandez

Yeah. Thank you.