

## II: New Student in the Midwest

### *Equity Spotlight Vodcast Series*

Mila González, Student - University of Arizona

Dr. Taucia González, MAP Center Equity Fellow - Wisconsin

#### TRANSCRIPTION

**Taucia:** So the summer before your eighth grade year, you moved to Madison, Wisconsin. And I imagine that was a big, a huge change for you. So can you tell us about what it was like going from Phoenix schools to Madison schools?

**Mila:** It was a lot different. Yeah, I remember when we first got to Madison... Yeah, it was a lot different. Not only the weather was different, like everything was different. The summers were so nice and then we had winter and just all that change was hard. And I remember my first day going to my new school, I was so scared. It was so big. There was what, 800 students out of that whole middle school. And compared to my old school it was so tiny.

**Taucia:** Oh I think it was like 800 students for K-8 at your old school.

**Mila:** Yeah, for the whole. Yeah. I don't know. I was just terrified to go into school. And then I remember walking in, sitting down in my first class and realizing I was basically one of the only students of Color in each class. There was only a few other students of Color, but I remember there were some classes where it was only just me. At first I didn't understand, "is this how it is? Like everywhere else except for Phoenix?" I still couldn't understand why this was happening to me and I was just confused throughout. I don't know. I feel like identity wasn't a huge deal in Phoenix as it was here.

**Taucia:** It became a huge deal for you, I imagine.

**Mila:** Yeah. So it's kind of hard to not notice when you're the only person of Color that walks into the room, and it's not only you that notices, but other people that notice.

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And of course everybody always has a hard time pronouncing my name. And I did have a few students come up to me saying, “Oh my God, your name is so exotic.” Or like, I'm like, what?

**Taucia:** Mila doesn't seem very exotic?

**Mila:** Yeah. And just my last name also. They're like, “Oh my God, it's so Mexican.” Just my name was hard for them. So not only my name was a big issue as them seeing me as the only Mexican, is when they asked why I moved here, and I explained to them that we moved here because of my mom's job and that she was a new professor at the university. They were always shocked. And that was another indication that that's not what they were expecting.

**Taucia:** Like you weren't fitting their stereotyped?

**Mila:** Yeah. That was always really hard to deal with. Eighth grade was hard being the new student because I'm very shy and quiet and so I had a hard time making friends. I remember the first few months during lunch I went in to sit with my teacher. And it wasn't until halfway through the year there were new students that came and the teacher introduced us. And as soon as we met, she introduced them as the foreign exchange students. And I was excited because I knew I can make friends with someone because the teacher introduced them to me and they explained that there were foreign exchange students, and I was just excited to have new students with me. So the teacher paired me up with them in every class basically. So we became really close and it was nice to have someone to talk to.

**Taucia:** Where were the foreign exchange students from?

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**Mila:** So there was about three of them, and they were from China, Spain, and Albania. And it was just cool to learn their different cultures. But I forget that it's only for a limited time. And so at the end of the eighth grade, they ended up all moving back. So I had to just start from nothing again going into high school.

**Taucia:** How else was Madison different?

**Mila:** So I grew up on the south side of Phoenix, and everybody was on the lower income. And school in Phoenix, I remember for PE, we just did laps outside or something. We just had very limited resources at that school. And I didn't really realize how other kids had better opportunities. I just thought "this is how everybody's school is. There's nothing wrong." And then when I moved to Madison. For PE, we had rock climbing, lacrosse, archery, and I'm like, "I've never heard of these sports." It was just so new. And of course I was excited but it just made me realize how different the schools were. How could one school have this much money, but the others...just realizing that was hard for me.

**Taucia:** Yeah. Why can't all kids have lacrosse and rock climbing?

**Mila:** Yeah. And again, south side Phoenix to Madison, we moved to a nicer neighborhood through my mom's job and we weren't...it's still in Madison. We weren't in the nicest part where most of the other professors lived. But we were still a step up from Phoenix.

**Taucia:** No helicopters overhead?

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- Mila:** Yeah. Not being awakened at night by everything.
- Taucia:** Gunshots.
- Mila:** And overall Madison was a lot safer. You could just leave your door wide open, go run down the street and then come back up and everything's safe.
- Taucia:** Safe to walk to school?
- Mila:** Yeah. And it felt like you never really had to worry at such a young age.
- Taucia:** About safety?
- Mila:** Yeah.
- Taucia:** Yeah.
- Mila:** Just on little day to day things.
- Taucia:** Yeah. I guess that'd be nice if all children could live like that. Right?
- Mila:** Mm-hmm (affirmative)
- Taucia:** Thank you.