



## FOCUS: SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL) FOR ENGLISH LEARNER AND IMMIGRANT STUDENTS

### VOICES FROM THE FIELD— Insights on “Soul-to Soul” Connections and SEL

Kimberly Franklin teaches 4th Grade, at [Bell Gardens Elementary School](#) in the [Montebello Unified School District](#) (MUSD). Teaching is a second career for Ms. Franklin. Previously, she worked as a curriculum developer for the Disney Institute, Walden University, as well as for NASA/JPL. She has taught for 13 years, is a MUSD Google Ambassador, and Certified Google Trainer. She brings all of this experience to the current transition to distance learning, noting that, “students are so excited to connect with us virtually, it is the joy of their day, and mine.” Kimberly, a technology expert (not her words), reports that she works throughout the day and into the evenings. Her day includes two roles woven together, teaching her students and teaching teachers. First, she ensures high quality learning experiences for her students. Another part of her day is dedicated to supporting other teachers in the evenings, “after their families (little ones) go to sleep.” She does this, “Not because I couldn’t say, no. I just don’t want to. It’s almost that you feel it is your duty if you know these tools to teach these tools.”

MUSD uses [Google Classroom](#) and Ms. Franklin prioritizes social and emotional



learning by meeting twice a day with her class for face-to-face interaction where she consistently provides a space and time for each student to share as part of her community building activities. She also sets time to meet with each student individually on Google Meet when they have struggled to connect with the lesson or the concept. First and foremost when they meet daily at 10 am and then again at 1pm, each student takes a turn to share how they are feeling. She also offers a 7pm check-in one night per week. This builds an online community of caring and stability that helps to “connect with each other on a compassionate level.” In a touching example, one of her students shared how worried he is that his little brother had to be hospitalized (non-COVID-19 related). This sharing led to many other students writing messages of empathy, prayer or concern in the chat box. Another moving example, captured unknowingly by Kimberly’s family during this community sharing, occurred when one of Kimberly’s fourth grade boys shared about how scared he was about a nightmare he’d had where he and his family died. Struggling to hold back tears, Kimberly comforted him by assuring him by saying, “this was not real... and I’m sending you a virtual hug.”

*“I have to understand that my students need just as much mental, social, [and] physical support as they do educational support, so I build in time for this.”*

Providing safe spaces for students to share about their real fears, demonstrating care and empathy and nurturing empathy with and among peers are even more important in these moments of uncertainty, while simultaneously creating and using new online learning tools and structures in this time of physical distancing, especially in communities such as these given many parents are still working.

Finally, Ms. Franklin summarized the first three weeks of distance learning through the three “F’s”: **F**orgiveness, **F**ear, **F**lexibility:

**Forgiveness.** For teachers, “it is a good time to forgive yourself. Try to learn one thing at a time. Whichever way you were connecting with your families and students, don’t stop. Don’t create strict schedules for students or families to follow because now we are in their environment and not our own. Some students need to work into the evenings. We need to be available for working moms. Team up with teachers who have different skills than you have.” She shares her strategy for responding to her English Learners’ needs, “Since my Spanish isn’t more than extremely basic... I use [Google Translate](#), but I have teamed up with another teacher and we have contacted families together to get them to link into their Google Classroom.”

**Fear.** “I have to understand that my students need just as much mental, social, [and] physical support as they do educational support, so I build in time for this.” Building time to create online opportunities for sharing, as well as finding [resources for social and emotional support](#) is critical. She believes, “New practices for physical distancing should not be interpreted as social distancing.” Connecting socially and emotionally with more vulnerable students who are fearful and uncertain about the pandemic can and should occur online.

**Flexibility.** Avoid adhering to strict schedules, “I’ve realized I can’t expect the same amount of work to be produced at home as it is at school... we’re in their environment and not our own [classrooms]. English Learners are being supported through closed captioning, visuals through screen share, videos showing drawings and manipulatives. Communication with students and their families is key. [In whatever way] you were connecting with your families and students don’t stop.”