

**VE:** Hello and welcome to our California Collaborative for Educational Excellence Podcast. My name is Valentin Escanuela and I'm an executive leadership coach in the equity department at the San Diego County Office of Education.

**VE:** I am joined today by my SDCOE colleagues, Dr. Steven Dorsey, who is also an executive leadership coach in the equity department, Izela Jacobo is a coordinator in the Multilingual Education and Global Achievement department, and Dr. Julie Goldman, a director for equity, curriculum, and instruction in the equity department. So welcome guys.

Good morning.

Good morning Valentin.

**VE:** So we've created 15 to 20 minute segments with overviews of the instructional continuity documents for different subgroups that you can access today. And we would like to explore some of the following questions today.

**VE:** So in the spirit of just celebrating the great things that are happening across our state, the question we really want to focus on today is - what are the lessons learned from our COVID-19 experience and how has it transformed education for the better? How can we continue to leverage best practices moving forward?

**VE:** And so we're in the middle of this pandemic. We're in the middle of a civil rights movement. There's a lot of things that are transpiring within our systems, within education, but there's also a lot of things that have come out - a lot of good things that have come out of this situation.

**VE:** And so as we think about - we're just going to start off with just technology as an example - so access to the internet and devices. As we look across our state, the way that districts have stepped up to get students connected, the way they have transformed the learning environments for schools, where students are engaging with teachers online, the way that they have partnered with local internet providers to ensure that every student has a connection to the internet so they can engage with education and have access to curriculum.

**VE:** Those are all great things that we need to think about when we begin to – and I'll put in air quotes – to normalize our systems and the way we do things with students is how we can continue to leverage those practices moving forward.

**VE:** Dr. Dorsey, what are you seeing as something that is really technologically helping students achieve at greater levels?

**SD:** Really, it's just that access point. So we now have students who can access the curriculum at any space or time, which is always a good leverage when we have kids at home. The pandemic closed all of our schools getting our kids to the point where they have the tools they need.

**SD:** San Diego County Office of Education, Dr. Gothold and Cox Communications did a great job of really stretching and going to those rural places to really make sure that we had the access we needed, because we want to keep things equitable. We don't want that digital divide to expand. We want to make sure that our kids are able to produce the things that they are asked for from their teachers and now they have that technology. It's not the end-all-be-all but we now have the connectivity. That is also spurring that communication piece with our families for African American families, for Native Indians, for EL learners. We are really expanding that because we've had to go out and push so much into these communities. It has created vicariously that great communication stream.

**VE:** You know we think about how sudden these school closures were, right? March 13 rolled around and schools were closing. And within that week, within those two weeks, schools began to think about how they could get these technology devices into the hands of students, right? They began to order new technology devices in order to be able to have enough devices for students.

**VE:** And so we're eight months down the road and in many of our places throughout the state, you know there are places where kids have one-to-one devices, where they have connection at home, and that's something that prior to the pandemic, we weren't really seeing that, right? And so we had to shift our view, we had to shift our lens of how we were providing services to students, how we were educating kids, and so that's been a big shift in education.

**VE:** In these past eight months, it's incredible how like March 13th came around and you know, we're in December now, right? And so being able to celebrate some of the things that we're seeing with technology, technology access for students has been, you know, something that we got to continue to think about. How can we keep that momentum of technology in our classroom, technology in the hands of our kids?

**IJ:** One of the things that we see, Valentin, for English Learners - and this is as we engage with stakeholders across the state - is that we're celebrating the access to technology, the access to internet. But we see and we find that the LEAs that are being most successful are those that are definitely paying close attention to developing - providing our parents with the tools that are needed to be able to support their students, and accessing that technology, and using that internet.

**IJ:** So definitely LEAs who are supporting parents with strategies to not only support the distance learning effort, but also to be able to support their students with accessing the platforms that we selected to utilize. So, so doing that in a number of languages and in a number of different ways has definitely been conducive to just have a higher level of engagement from our English Learner families and students.

**IJ:** The other thing that we're seeing is that LEAs that are investing time and resources to provide the professional development that is needed for their staff, to be able to again, maximize that technology, maximize that internet use, in a way that is leveraged to provided the English language development services that our ELs needs.

**IJ:** So there's been a number of surveys that have been conducted across the state, in which teachers have been very clear they feel the most successful when they're getting focused professional development on the things they need to be doing for students. Particularly for English learners, our teachers have voiced and expressed multiple times that desire, that desperate need for support, with English language development, that it's designated and that it's integrated. I'm not sure if you're seeing the same for some of your other subgroups.

**VE:** Absolutely, and you know, you transition us into a really good point. This idea that, you know, professional learning for teachers is critical, right, whether it's EL. One of those things that were also saying that's come to the forefront - this idea of social emotional learning, right? And so we have to be able to figure out how to provide social emotional learning support to students. And you know, it used to be the counselor, it used to be the therapist, it used to be the social worker on campus, but as more students are struggling to cope with, you know, the current situation that we're in, is how are teachers receiving professional learning to be able to embed those social emotional learning strategies into the curriculum? And so that is something that is difficult but it's definitely a need.

**VE:** We need to continue to figure out how can we support our teacher so that they are embedding those strategies into their daily instruction as they are teaching kids, in order to create those spaces and those opportunities for students to be able to talk about things that are happening, to digest some of the things that they're seeing on TV with a lot of the social movement social justice movement that's happening right now in our country. And so I know Dr. Julie Goldman, you've been involved with that and supporting teachers throughout our county as well.

**JG:** Yes, and I concur Valentin, that it's not only the how, but it's also the understanding of how impactful social emotional learning is and understanding the connection that this is how our brains work and this is how we prepare brains for learning. And for teachers and leaders to be able to see if we're engaging in opening our space when we're meeting synchronously with our students, if we are engaging in social emotional learning, this is academic. They're not two separate things. So it is the how and the impact and really not thinking of them as isolated constructs, but really truly integrating both into our instructional practice. And that could be one of the really positive aspects that we see, you know, post-pandemic.

**SD:** Well I'm gonna add one more thing in there, Dr. Goldman. As we are expanding our social emotional learning for our students, it is imperative for our district leaders and our site administrative leaders to focus on the SEL component on the adults in the system. So many times, we expect our teachers to do so much. They are carrying so much weight and they are always filling others' cups from their own, but you can't fill from an empty cup. So as administrators, as district sites, we have to go through and make sure that we are supporting our teachers in the social emotional content. Making sure that they are practicing self-care and taking care of themselves so they can continue to fill their students' cups.

**VE:** That is a great point.

**IJ:** I agree, I definitely agree. We hear from our teachers that they are trying so hard. They have this passion and we need to attend to that passion and that commitment. They are recognizing more than

ever that moral imperative they have towards their students, towards their communities, and their classrooms. We definitely need to be providing them with the tools and the resources that they need, in order to continue to attend to the diversity of our students. And I'm bringing back the focus to students and really want to emphasize that often, when we talk about our students we tend to group them. So I'm here speaking on behalf of our English learners. It's critical that we recognize that within that subgroup, there's so much diversity. We have newcomers, we have refugees, we have transnational students, undocumented students, we have long-term yield. There's so much within that group that needs to be revealed and that we need to learn from, so we can best design instruction for them.

**IJ:** And when I hear about that social emotional piece, it's so critical that when we're providing professional development, when we're engaged and professional development, we peel that onion and we look again at that diversity that I'm talking about. As a student teacher supervisor working with a number of teacher candidates, I know that, for example, engaging with newcomers who are new to the system, new to the country, new to the curricula and grade level. For them it's been devastating to not only not speak the language and have that access that other students have, but also not having that ability to connect with your teacher the same way you were in a regular classroom, to connect with friends, make friends. So we have students who were sitting in isolation at home not being able to engage with the school system the way they would in a normal environment.

**IJ:** And on top of that, many times these are households in which parents are working two jobs. These are households of essential workers who are going outside of their home to do what they need to be doing, leaving children at home in charge of their own learning.

**JG:** And so similarly, Izela, you know we see exactly what you just talked about, like understanding the typologies and the histories. We see the same thing in the American Indian communities and best serving our American Indian communities, and you know, it really comes down to knowing our students and knowing our communities and doing our best to become students of our students. For example, in the California Indian Education for All movement, there are these seven essential understandings that Dr. Proudfoot from Cal State San Marcos developed and it's really about understanding the diversity among our American Indian communities. And you know, the differences of either living in an urban context or reservation or assimilated in the concepts of sovereignty.

**JG:** And so one example of understanding what our communities are asking for and connected with all of the social emotional learning and learning in general is, recently, we met with a group of American Indian stakeholders and they said, you know, when you're leading the Pledge of Allegiance or having a really important meeting, we'd really like you to hold land acknowledgment, like that would be really meaningful for us. And so we made that shift and we started holding land acknowledgements and working with districts to do the same so something like that can really be so meaningful to engage our communities.

**SD:** That's a great example of being culturally responsive to whatever demographic you have in your area and that follows right into teachers as well to support the students, as they need to be culturally responsive in their teaching and learning. So important that the kids are seeing themselves even in the

digital component. That they are relating with the topic, relating with the subject matter, so they are more engaged and more inclined to stay engaged.

**VE:** And we're seeing this across our state and we're seeing people having success with creating those opportunities for students. And so when they're seeing themselves, when we're creating spaces that are helping heal some of the things that our kids are experiencing at home establish those relationships. So we have to be very intentional with how we are engaging our students in that virtual platform so that they can access, said they have the right tools, but also have the right environment to be able to share you know how they're feeling, what's going on with them, or in their communities, we're seeing the connectedness that they have with the adults, right? When that content is scaffolded to where the teacher understands where the student is with their language acquisition and being able to provide access to them, the students feel more connected to the school. And so that's something that's been a common theme across, is that the teachers that are in their classrooms that are really having those strong connections are the ones that really understand who their students are, right? Because during this time of virtual learning, students coming and going, it's really hard to establish those relationships. So we have to be very intentional with how we are engaging our students in that virtual platform so that they can access, so they have the right tools, but also have the right environment to be able to share you know how they're feeling, what's going on with them, in order for us to be that responsive, have those responsive ways of responding to their needs.

**JG:** And that's such a good point Valentin, because, in many of our teachers, you know, 80% of our teachers are not from these communities that we're discussing today. And when we think that many of us were raised in more individualist cultures or contexts and many of our students are coming from more collectivist mindsets, meaning you know, they work really well in groups and there's not that sense of competition. Not only group projects. But an example with the American Indian community might be you know engaging in place-based learning. You know, really using our environment around us to leverage learning and when we structure our instruction to how our students best learn, then we will also see these positive outcomes.

**VE:** Absolutely, and we got to talk about the non-tech options right. We've been talking about technology and how kids have access to curriculums, how kids have access to staff through technology, but what about the students that are for - and I'll give an example, for some of our American Indian students who live on reservations or they're rule communities, they may not have that tech option, right? And so we're seeing schools transform the way that they are connecting with students, the way they're delivering materials, the way they're delivering instruction to students in a non-tech way. We have to celebrate that because that's also something that we've seen, that's working, that's keeping kids connected to school

**SD:** Right and something that covers all of our demographics that need that non-tech option are our students with disabilities. Not every kid can be on a device to learn. Some of our kids have a special needs where they need a non-tech component that's really gonna support them and what they do and how they learn and that is so key.

**IJ:** And for English learners the LEAs that have been more successful in meeting the needs for students who either don't have that access to technology or internet or are opting not to use technology or the internet. What we're finding is that it's not only the paper packet. It's that connection via the phone at least with the teacher and peers. Again going back to that social emotional piece and the critical need for those strong connections. So it's the paper packet, it's the book, with that human interaction via phone. And we know that our teachers have been extremely creative in finding other ways to connect with those students, and we definitely need to continue to push ourselves and think outside of the vlogs to create more ways because we definitely know that's one of the groups that it's just falling behind and it needs to be continued to be attended to.

**IJ:** I do want to say though that, for both groups that are the ones who are using the technology, the ones who aren't using the technology, in conversations with teachers and admin, I really made a point of focusing on not only the content that you're delivering but also ensuring that the platforms and the designs that you're having your students and parents face, are conducive to higher levels of engagement. So really thinking about engagement as you're selecting those platforms and selecting the way you'll design those materials. Thinking about not only the engagement piece but also the access piece - so is that platform that you're selecting one that will be user-friendly to the kinder first grade parent that will be supporting learning at home?

**IJ:** And then how are you ensuring that our parents have the access to those tools that they'll need again to be able to operate that platform and understand that design? So really amplifying our perspective when we're designing instruction and definitely not only focusing on the content but also having, giving special considerations to those platforms and the design and ensuring that communication we're setting forth for parents to explain those platforms and those designs is going out in multiple languages via different media. Again, I'm thinking about some of our parents who might be illiterate or might not have the time to sit down and read the memo or the email. So how are we being creative to reach out and connect with those families as well?

**VE:** And that transitions into our last topic of the day and that's this idea of communication, right? So we've spoken about a lot of best practices in this first part of the podcast and the throughline here, really is communication. And so where we're seeing the most success is where student schools have created multiple entry points for families, right? They have translation services available, they're communicating those things out to families about hey if you need to connect with us we have translation available. Feel free to drop us a message you know via email, via text message. We have our monthly coffee with the principal that you can show up to. So there's different, multiple entry points that they're creating for staff and teachers to be able to connect and that's been very helpful especially during this time, as we're trying to push out information to many other communities throughout the state.

**SD:** Right, and it's really important because districts now understanding that communication really needs to be a true two way communication. Where so many times as schools and districts, we are pushing out information. But now, it's we are pushing out information but we need a response back so we can see where students are, we're parents are, who is an essential worker, as they're going through.

There was actually an example of a school district who really started quickly to utilize the food lines, that they were giving out food every day. And they realized, oh my gosh these are parents that we normally do not talk to and so they got translators. They got all the documents that they needed and they started to have conversations at car windows and it proved to be so valuable to them. And they were able to find kids that were not connected to school and they used their PTA and had them help hand out food. So then you're having people who feel even safer and more communicative because they're talking with their friends and families in the community. It changed the game for that district, communication-wise.

**JG:** And Dr. Dorsey, I think that is also what we've seen with - leveraging those same situations are tribal education agencies and are in our tribal liaisons in those same contexts, like really expanding our circles to include all aspects of our communities.

**SD:** Right. Those community partners - so important. Within the African American community - so important. Your NAACPs. All of your educational aspects that are associations that are there to help and support with mental health, with all kinds of other aspects that are so needed right now. Especially now, as we're getting closer to that vaccine point, and we know things are going to transition again, but we're not sure how fast.

**IJ:** So we're also hearing from our English learner families up and down the state that they feel that communication in their home languages has definitely been more positive, so that is definitely a celebration for our English learner communities as well.

**JG:** And also to make note here just how important it is to have our interpreters and translators who are certified. In our districts we've really seen, you know, the need for their high-quality work and it's not just somebody who is speaking Spanish but it's an actual field of study that are interpreters and translators and they have been incredibly helpful during this time.

**IJ:** Absolutely. I agree, not only for interpretation and translations, but also as they support our families in navigating a system that so many times, is unknown to them. So having that person who understands your language, your culture, is definitely one of those things that has emerged from the pandemic. More LEAs bringing in that type of staff member that has that language and cultural skill to bridge that gap between our staff and our families.

**VE:** That is so critical when you have that staff member on, that can connect, that knows a community, that knows exactly how to bring them in. And so I know here in San Diego, we've had some districts that have hired liaisons, community liaisons, during this time that became a position where they hired people to come in to be able to target input and feedback from specific communities that they serve. And so that's been incredibly helpful in helping them be responsive to the needs of those communities because they're gathering the information that they need in order for them to develop systems within the school, that helps support families and students, right? And so this communication piece, it's just so critically important and so many people are doing it so well and have transformed how they're communicating, they transformed how they're engaging parents, they transformed how they're engaging students in decision making, and so that's something that's changed.

**VE:** And so I'd like to thank all of you for being here today to talk about these important topics and the successes that we're seeing throughout our state with our schools, in our LEAs, as they continue to shape and mold and change how they're educating our students here in California. So we'd like to thank you for listening to a podcast. We're excited about the work before us as we continue to improve educational experiences for students across the state. I really encourage you to reflect and identify the great things that you are doing, given the conditions, in order to inform how you can leverage best practices moving forward. So please be sure to check out [ccee-ca.org](http://ccee-ca.org) for additional information and resources.