

Mrs. Song Moon: Fremont Teacher of the Year

One of LBUSD's "Understandings" to be an exemplary teacher is U6. This understanding is probably the most difficult to achieve during a typical school year, but even more difficult during a pandemic year due to COVID related school closures and virtual learning. U6 requires a teacher to cultivate a classroom atmosphere, where teachers deliberately balance caring relationships with high expectations and support for student success, and provide a foundation for a safe learning environment that values diversity, trust, and respectful communication. Mrs. Song Moon has been exceptional in all three practices of U6.

One of my earliest memories of Mrs. Moon was her personal story of being a child who immigrated with her family from Korea to the United States. While establishing high expectations for learning sight word vocabulary, reading fluency and comprehension, she shared with her students (and parents) that it was very difficult for her as a second grader in a new country to learn to read English. Not only did this help students build a personal connection with her to feel welcome and included, her personal story also helped students establish their own personal growth mindset and goals. My daughter is a struggling reader who adopted the mindset "I can do hard things" as a result of Mrs. Moon's narrative. Additionally, Mrs. Moon addressed my daughter's reading needs with flexibility and sensitivity by accommodating her reading strengths (sight word vocabulary cards instead of reading lists), videotaped reading assessment alternatives rather than live zoom evaluations, and self selected chunks of text during read alouds to ensure my daughter's dignity. This was not unique to Zoe, but to all of Mrs. Moon's students. She emphasized the importance of reading and nurtured confidence.

Another impression Mrs. Moon made on me was her ownership of and personal responsibility for student outcomes. Mrs. Moon has had perfect attendance, she has planned and prepared for every instructional minute with grade level curriculum and rigorous content, and she has implemented interventions and extensions to ensure that all of her students achieve. During our parent conference in November, Mrs. Moon said, "I have never taught any

one with Down syndrome. I don't know how." I shared the accommodations and strategies that I use with Zoe at home. "Those are ELL strategies. I use those. Those strategies were used with me," she said excitedly. From that day, I felt that Mrs. Moon was creating opportunities for me to help support and optimize my daughter's learning. This experience allowed me to express my gratitude for her as a teacher. And it was soon Thanksgiving, Mrs. Moon's favorite holiday. Zoe and I gave her the book *Thank You, Omu*, our favorite book about sharing and gratitude. I thought the book was a fitting analogy because even though Omu shared a pot of stew, Mrs. Moon shared a pot of learning experiences and concepts to be digested by diverse students. It was my way of saying, "Mrs. Moon, you do know how. You're sharing the pot of stew." And for the first time, I felt that a teacher at Fremont was giving Zoe, a student with the stigma of an intellectual disability amongst high achieving peers, equal access to learning, meaningful opportunities to engage in learning, and the chance to show her knowledge and skills as a valued member of her school community.

My most recent recollection of Mrs. Moon is the most meaningful. During disability awareness month in March and World Down Syndrome (Ds) Day, Mrs. Moon let me, Zoe and a few of her classmates present to her class. Zoe and her classmates recorded a video that explained Ds as a genetic variation; I shared powerpoint slides highlighting common characteristics and medical conditions associated with Ds; and showed a video expressing the importance of inclusion for students with Ds. The presentation was followed by a student driven Q & A, whereby students engaged with the material with empathy and unconditional positive regard for Zoe. Although the students' were greatly impacted by the learning experience, Mrs. Moon seemed equally affected. A classmate asked, "Does Zoe do the same work?" I laughingly replied, "All that homework that Mrs. Moon gives you, Zoe does it, too. But guess what, it takes her 5 times as long to complete!" As Zoe's classmates eyes got bigger, Mrs. Moon's mouth dropped. "Wow!" she said with an incredible smile that not only recognized the power and potential of her students, but also endorsed her image as Fremont Teacher of the Year!