**GatesFoundation\_JeanZelt\_MollySimonetti\_FINAL**

Coworkers Jean Zelt and Molly Simonetti reflect on their experiences as teachers in a California middle school where Jean teaches math and Molly is a speech therapist. Both are part of the CARE network, which creates systems to support student belonging and engagement for students of color and low socioeconomic status in eighth grade.

**Jean:** Back in the day of No Child Left Behind, if math scores didn't meet a certain annual yearly progress, schools were in trouble and it's hard not to feel pressured from that. We just need to teach it. You need to learn this. We got to move on. And with the CARE network, we've been taught learning’s not going to occur at high levels unless the students feel a relationship to the class, especially our students of color. I really feel that in math, it's so important for kids to feel that they belong, to feel that they're seen and heard, even if that means going slower in pace. So having that pressure relieved and being allowed to make relationships, it's just so rewarding to be able to learn about my students in a deeper way. Have there been some eye-opening things that you've learned from participating in our CARE network?

**Molly:** Oh my gosh, yes. One of the biggest ones I think for me was just how deep the divide is between academics and emotions. There's this whole other more invisible side of our being that schools have gotten away from, focusing on the scores and the academics. And so for me, the CARE network tying in — Where are we mentally? Are we feeling connected? Are we feeling safe? Are we seeing our students’ cultures around us? Do their families feel welcome here? We don't really have a holistic approach to humans in education, so I love that it's important to the people I work with.

**Jean:** Yeah. And with the CARE network, we're able to collaborate not just with our school site, which is something that is wonderful. Every two weeks, we're collaborating across curriculum, across disciplines. But we get to meet with educators from other school districts, other cities in our state.

**Molly:** It is cool to see what other schools are doing and kind of cross-reference each other. And also hearing some of the things we've heard from students. I have been blown away by things I've heard kids say. We don't often give them the time to express those things. For me, the most exciting thing is sort of doing my job as a speech pathologist, but also I've somehow gone into more of a counseling role to a lot of kids. I've put such efforts forward to make a safe space, so it's really exciting for me to be involved in this time in kids' lives. There's always some big thing happening in the kid's life.

**Jean:** That's really such a blessing to love what you do so much. It's not a job when you love what you're doing.

**Molly:** Yeah, it's adding so much enrichment to my life, and I'm just growing so much. So it's just really adding a whole other layer to who I am and my understanding of the world and my understanding of humans.