

## 2017 Arizona EL Teacher of the Year

### Kelly Neckels



Mrs. Kelly Neckels was born and raised in Phoenix, Arizona where she has been teaching English learners for the past 18 years. She began her teaching career in the Tolleson Elementary School District, where she taught for 6 years, and has been currently teaching in the Pendergast Elementary School District for the last 12 years. Over the course of her teaching career, Mrs. Neckels has taught 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> grade. Kelly received her Bachelors of Arts in Education with Honors in 2000 from Arizona State University, and went on to earn her Masters of Education Degree with Distinction from Northern Arizona University in 2004. Her

endorsements include English as a Second Language, Reading Specialists, and Early Childhood for grades K-12. Kelly is married to Jarrod Neckels, who also teaches in the Pendergast Elementary School District. Between the two of them, they have six amazing children and one beautiful granddaughter.

Kelly has been very involved in the district and held many leadership positions over the course of her teaching career. She has been an active member of the Well Managed School Committee as a Boys Town Consultant, served on her school's site council, was a member of the district TIIES Committee, has been an SEI Model Classroom, has been a Jump Start Director and Coordinator, and is a new teacher mentor for the Pendergast Elementary School District. Her hard work and dedication to her students, her school, and the district have not gone unnoticed. In her time with the district, she has been awarded both Teacher of the Year and Pride of Pendergast for Amberlea Elementary School.

When asked about her educational philosophy, Mrs. Neckels stated that, "My educational philosophy, as it relates to teaching EL students, is to cultivate an environment where my students feel a sense of security to take risks in their learning, to push themselves even further than their academic comfort level, and to develop a love and passion for learning, all while developing their proficiency in the English language. I also believe that showing my students how much I care about them as people as well as learners, encourages them to develop positive relationships among each other. When my students feel secure, encouraged, and loved, they support each other in their journey to becoming proficient in the English language."

Mrs. Neckels has said that, "I truly feel that every single day that I walk away from teaching my EL students, I feel rewarded!" She goes on to tell of one of her most rewarding experiences with a student from last year saying, "He came to our school from Uzbekistan. He knew very little English and was extremely insecure about the fact that he could not communicate with all of us. Through a lot of hard work and perseverance, he managed to walk away from third grade with a solid understanding of the English language. He went from pre-emergent to intermediate on the AZELLA assessment! Now as a 4<sup>th</sup> grader, he still comes into my classroom every day to say good morning and to tell me something about his previous day or what he hopes the new day will bring! The fact that he does this, and more importantly is comfortable enough to do this, is so rewarding and solidifies why I do what I do each and every day!"

Mrs. Neckels is humbled and honored by being named this year's 2017 Arizona EL Teacher of the Year.