

Welcome! We are so glad you are here!

Something to think about...

What inspired you to come to this sectional today?

**Belonging Matters:
Fostering School Connection to Help
Prevent Youth Suicide
PSW Conference 2025**

Vision: Every Child Safe, Healthy and Connected

- Diversity + Inclusion + Equity = Belonging
 - We create learning spaces where all participants experience belonging
 - We support educator voice and honor lived experiences
 - We provide accommodations, choice and flexibility

“A deep sense of love and belonging is an irreducible need of all people. We are biologically, cognitively, physically, and spiritually wired to love, to be loved, and to belong.”

– Brené Brown



BELONG

**Wisconsin Safe & Healthy
Schools Center**

wisheschools.org

Mission: We grow the capacity of educators to positively impact the well-being and equitable outcomes of every student.



Agenda

- ★ Connection before Content
- ★ Understanding School Belonging
- ★ Why School Belonging Matters
- ★ Creating a Culture of Belonging in Schools
 - Practical Tools and Resources for Schools

Objective



To provide educators with:

- ★ Knowledge
- ★ Strategies
- ★ Practical tools

To foster a sense of belonging in their schools, helping to reduce the risk of suicide among youth.

Crisis Resources



24/7 CALL, TEXT, CHAT

Text “HOPELINE” to 741741



<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/get-help/>

Text START to 678-678

Call 1-866-488-7386



Connection before Content

A deep sense of love and belonging is an irreducible need of all people. We are biologically, cognitively, physically, and spiritually wired to love, to be loved, and to belong. When those needs are not met, we don't function as we were meant to. We break. We fall apart. We numb. We ache. We hurt others. We get sick.

– *Brene Brown*

1

"Being able to feel safe with other people is probably the single most important aspect of mental health; safe connections are fundamental to meaningful and satisfying lives."

–BESSEL VAN DER KOLK

2

The most terrible poverty is loneliness, and the feeling of being unloved." -Mother Teresa.

Brittany C. Cherry

3

Which of these quotes is speaking to you today?

Understanding School Belonging

What does it mean to belong in a school?



Dr. Sybil Jordan Hampton-

- Consultant
- Educator
- Philanthropist
- Arkansas' Black Hall of Fame inductee who was part of The Lost Year in 1958-59, when Little Rock schools were shut down in an effort to block desegregation talks about her school experience.

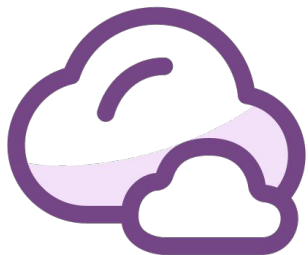
FULL [Code Switch Episode from January 2024](#)

What does it mean to belong in school?

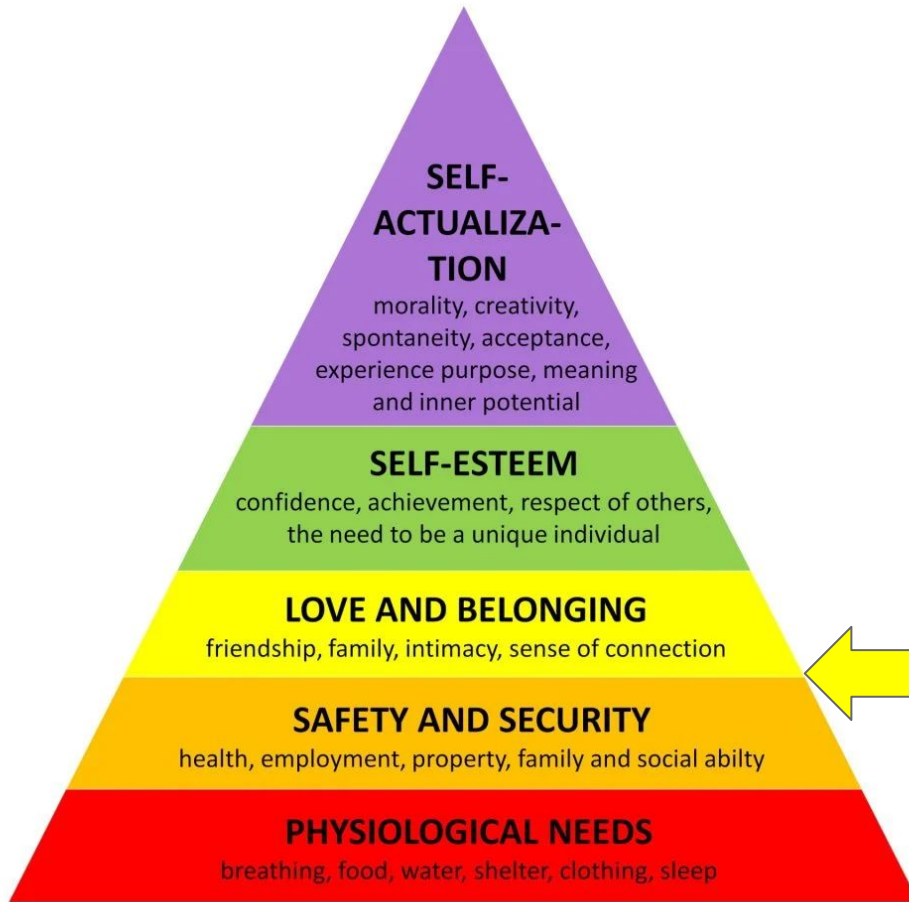
What words come to mind as you think about school belonging and it's meaning.

Add your words and phrases to the slido poll and we will create a word cloud using your ideas.





What does it mean to belong in school?

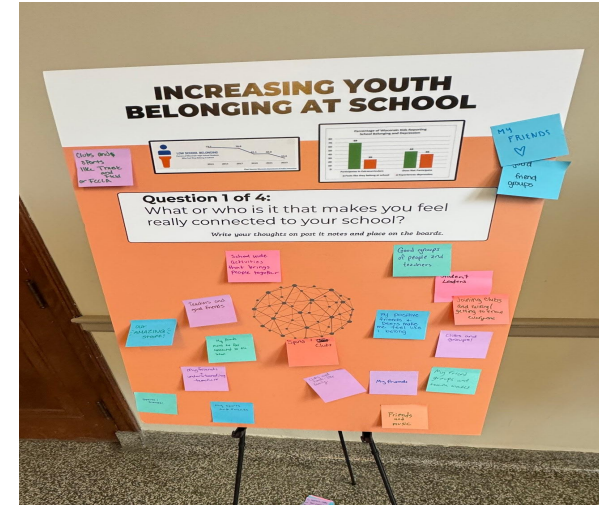


Belonging includes:

- Being seen
- Being and feeling included
- Contributions valued
- Participate and make demands in the design of social and cultural structures

Youth Voice: What or who is it that makes you feel really connected to your school?

- ★ Friends
- ★ School staff/teachers
- ★ Clubs and sports



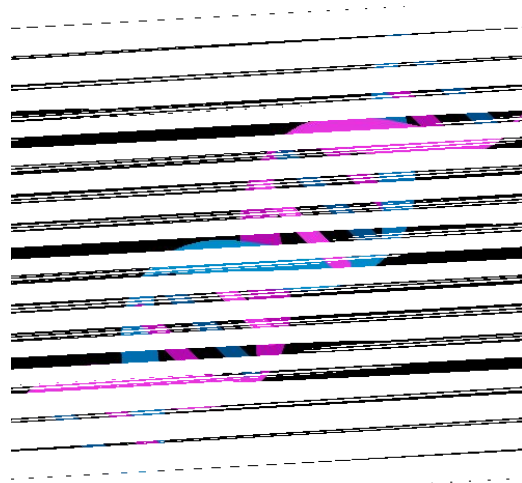
“More than just being seen or feeling included, belonging entails having a voice and the opportunity to use it to make demands upon society and political institutions. Belonging is more than having access; it is about the power to co-create the structures that shape a community.”

The Othering and Belonging Institute



Why Belonging Matters

The need to belong is embedded in our genetic code.



What does the research tell us?

- Belonging is **linked to academic engagement, mental health, and overall well-being.**
- A sense of belonging **can significantly reduce** suicide risk, anxiety, depression, and substance abuse in students.
- Social isolation is **strongly linked to feelings of hopelessness and increased suicide risk.**

What does research tell us?

Children who experience school belonging will **benefit in many ways**, such as:

- More likely to stay **engaged in schoolwork**
- **Better** academic performance
- Feeling **happy** and **self-confident**
- **Less likely** to experience loneliness, anxiety, and depression
- **Less likely** to engage in risky behaviors (like substance abuse or violence)

What does the research tell us?

Students with **strong school connections** are **less likely to attempt suicide** or self-harm.

Positive peer relationships and teacher support are **key factors in reducing suicide risk**.

- **Example:** In a study of at-risk youth, those with a stronger sense of school belonging had significantly lower rates of suicidal ideation, regardless of other risk factors.
- Youth who feel disconnected from school are at a higher risk for mental health struggles.

18.6%

Percent of Wisconsin High School Students have seriously considered suicide. (up from 2021)

35%

About thirty-five percent of Wisconsin students report depression (feeling sad or hopeless (almost every day for two weeks or more in a row).

8.7%

Percent of Wisconsin high school students attempted suicide.(up from 2021)

14.9%

Fourteen percent of Wisconsin high school students made a plan about how they would attempt suicide. (up from 2021)

Data from the Wisconsin 2023 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) (Participating students' reported during the 12 months preceding the YRBS survey.)

54%

Overall, 54% of students agreed or strongly agreed that they belong at their school... a significant decrease since 2017 (70.8%) and down 6% from 2021.

30%

Only 30% of students with D/F averages report feeling that they belong at school.

1.5x

Being involved in extracurriculars associated with better mental health outcomes and stronger sense of belonging... 1.5 times more likely to feel like they belonged at school

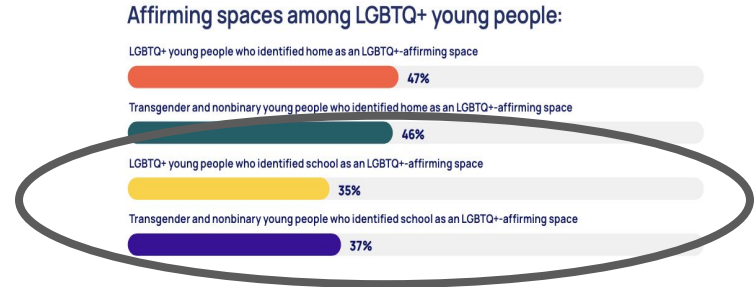
Data from the Wisconsin 2021 [Youth Risk Behavior Survey \(YRBS\)](#) (Participating students' reported during the 12 months preceding the YRBS survey.)



Populations placed at higher risk



People with disabilities are at higher risk for suicide.



Facts About Suicide Among LGBTQ+ Young People

LGBTQ+ young people are not inherently prone to suicide risk because of their sexual orientation or gender identity but rather placed at higher risk because of how they are mistreated and stigmatized in society.



Small Group Connect

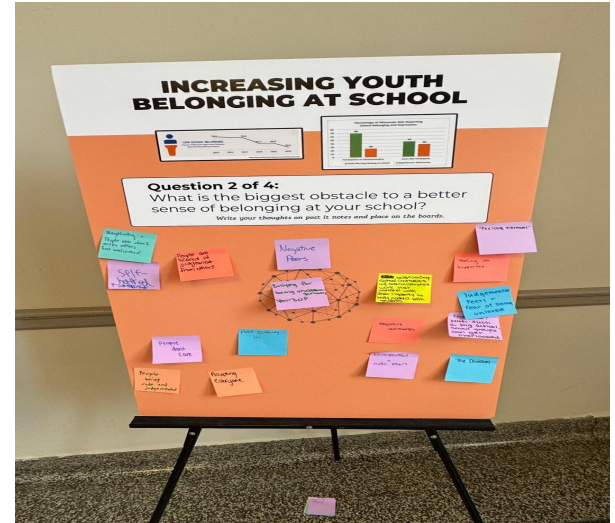
- ★ What thoughts are you having about what you've learned so far?

- ★ What connections are you making to your own work in schools?

Creating a Culture of Belonging in Schools

Youth Voice: What is the biggest obstacle to a better sense of belonging at your school?

- ★ Judgement
- ★ Not accepting everyone
- ★ Bullying
- ★ Negativity and disrespect
- ★ Division
- ★ Lack of support



Youth Voice: Describe your current school culture in three words.



**Youth Voice:
If you could
change one
thing about
your school's
culture, what
would it be?**



- 
- A top-down view of various baking ingredients and tools. In the center is a pile of white flour with a scalloped-edged cookie cutter. To the left is a white ceramic dish containing a cracked egg yolk. Above it are two whole brown eggs and one cracked eggshell. A wooden rolling pin lies horizontally across the top. To the right, a block of butter is partially unwrapped. In the bottom left, a wooden spoon and a butter knife are visible. On the right side, a spiral-bound notebook is open, displaying a list of four items, each preceded by a black star symbol.
- ★ Supportive adult connections
 - ★ Positive Peer Relationships
 - ★ Involvement in School Culture and Activities
 - ★ A Safe and Inclusive School Environment

A recipe for a culture of belonging in schools

Begin with assessment

How can schools assess belonging?

EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES

What does the research say about effective ways to increase school connectedness?

Successful efforts to build school connectedness begin with assessment, which enables staff to establish a baseline, identify areas for improvement, and monitor progress.

- Each of the four components of school connectedness can be measured systematically via school climate surveys, student surveys, interviews, focus groups (including students and/or faculty and staff), and the analysis of school records (such as disciplinary referrals, absences, and rates of participation in school activities and extracurriculars).
- Researchers at the Harvard Graduate School of Education have created a [mapping tool](#) that teachers can use to identify students who appear to have few positive relationships with teachers, staff, and/or peers.



Culture and Climate Surveys

- Consider questions to ask to assess belonging:
 - Student relationships
 - Staff connections
 - Extra-curricular and club involvement



Relationship Mapping

A free tool to identify students who they believe do not currently have positive relationships with any school adults and identify staff who will volunteer to build a stronger relationship with them.

fx Grades

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	
Grades	Student First Name	Student Last Name	Race (optional)	Gender (optional)	Positive Relationships With Staff Adults															
			<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
			<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
			<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
			<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
			<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



MAKING
CARING
COMMON
PROJECT



Positive Peer Relationships

Extracurricular activities and clubs

Considerations:

- Are there extracurricular options available for a wide range of students?
- Have we considered populations placed at higher risk for suicide?
- How can we invite students into these spaces?

Peer to Peer Suicide Prevention and Mental Health Stigma Reduction



A NAMI Wisconsin Program

Peer Mentorship

- Positive benefits for both parties.
- Builds SEL skills
 - Communication
 - Social Skills
- Increased confidence and self-esteem



Supportive Adult Connections



“The universal principle of connection means that we make it a priority to do whatever it takes to increase the number and strength of relationships for *all* students instead of waiting for something to go wrong first.”

Alex Shevrin Venet

Equity-Centered Trauma-Informed Education

“Students feel more connected to school when teachers use **explicit strategies to show that **they care** about them, **know them** as individuals, and are **willing to respond** to their **distinct needs**”**

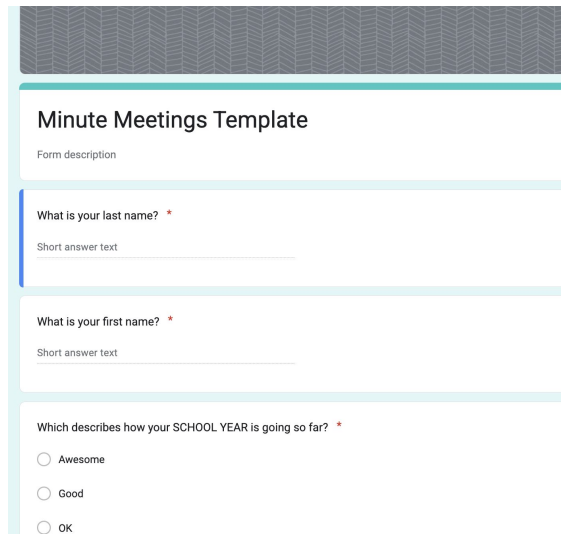
Explicit strategies

- Greet students by name and with eye contact daily
- Be visible in hallways, lunchrooms, and common areas
- Follow up on past conversations to show you care
- Celebrate birthdays and individual achievements

Help students feel seen, known, and valued

Minute Meetings

- Brief 1:1 check ins
- Build connections
- Find out how the student is doing
- Can be done very quickly



The image shows a screenshot of a Google Form titled "Minute Meetings Template". The form has a grey patterned header. Below the title, there is a "Form description" field. The first question is "What is your last name? *" with a "Short answer text" input field. The second question is "What is your first name? *" with a "Short answer text" input field. The third question is "Which describes how your SCHOOL YEAR is going so far? *" with three radio button options: "Awesome", "Good", and "OK".

[Minute meeting example](#)

[Article about Minute Meetings](#)

It matters early on.

“There is some evidence that building a sense of connectedness to school staff when students are young can reduce suicide risk in adolescence and early adulthood.”



And it REALLY matters

“A meta-analysis of individual and social level factors that influence school belonging found that teacher support is the strongest predictor of student belonging.”



A Safe and Inclusive School Environment

Building a Culture of Inclusion

Core Principles of Inclusive Schools:

- Respect for diversity (race, gender, ability, etc.)
- Encouragement of all students to participate in school activities
- Active efforts to combat bullying and exclusion

Fostering Inclusivity:

- Teach empathy and collaboration in the classroom.
- Implement peer mentorship programs.
- Establish safe spaces for students to express themselves (e.g., LGBTQ+ support groups).

Restorative Practices

Create a culture of connection, respect and accountability

[The Science of Relationships](#) (WISH Center)



Fostering Belonging, Transforming Schools

The Impact of Restorative Practices

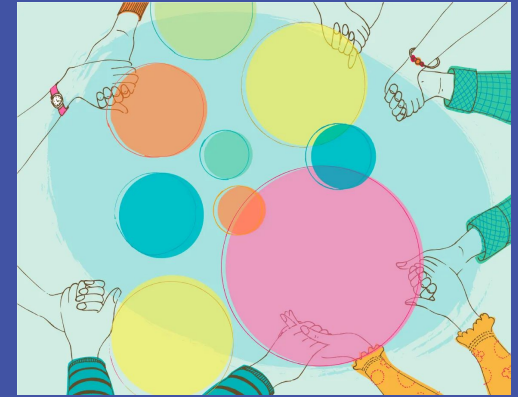
Sean Darling-Hammond



MAY 2023

Key Takeaways

- Inclusive Environments Matter
- A Sense of Belonging is a Protective Factor
- Educators Play a Crucial Role
- Prevention is Possible





Call to Action

Question and Answer



Audience Q&A



Let's get social!



@WISHschools



@Wisconsin Safe and
Healthy Schools Center



@wishschools



www.wishschools.org



@WISHSchoolsWI



SCAN FOR TRAINING INFO

