



Finding Belonging: A Discussion Guide

Are you observing more challenging student behaviors, attendance issues, and low levels of student motivation and engagement? Are there students within your school(s) who do not feel a sense of belonging or being a part of the school community?

“I didn’t want to ask for help unless I was drowning and then when I was drowning, it was too late.”

—Xuan Truong

This video and discussion guide can be used to facilitate staff discussions about fostering belonging and the important role of relationships. The discussion guide includes information to support facilitating the discussion, reaction questions that will support teams in reflecting and sharing their perspectives, application questions designed to build understanding and action, and additional resources to support further focus on this topic.

Facilitating the Discussion

This section provides an overview of the process¹ and materials needed to facilitate a discussion focused on fostering belonging. Although this structured process is based on the video, *Stories From the Classroom: Finding Belonging*, a similar structure may be used for other videos, articles, and discussions.

Process

- Review [Finding Belonging video](#) and discussion guide.
- Select target participants (e.g., school staff, families, students) for the discussion.
- Schedule at least 10–15 minutes to view the 3:39-minute video and conduct a discussion. For larger groups or those with diverse stakeholder representation, consider providing additional time for introductions and discussion.
- Share printed or electronic session materials with participants based on local preference.
- Prior to the session, ensure that the sound works for the video and the room is set up to facilitate discussion opportunities.
- Structure the time together to facilitate conversation. A sample structure is in Exhibit 1. This may be adapted based on the group dynamics and familiarity with the process.

Materials

- Video
- Screen sharing technology
- Discussion questions
- Additional material (as relevant)

¹ This process has been adapted from the IDEA Partnerships Dialogue Process. Additional suggestions for facilitation are in the *Dialogue Guide Facilitator Handbook* (https://nasdse.org/docs/dialogue_guide.pdf).



Exhibit 1. Sample Meeting Structure

Step	Description of step
Introductions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide a time for participants to introduce themselves, if they are not already familiar with one another.
Set dialogue purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review why this conversation is important within your context. Identify the purpose of this reflection and discussion. [For example, have students expressed feeling disconnected? Have you noticed an increase with attendance issues or behavioral challenges?]
Establish ground rules for discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that all participants feel welcome and safe sharing their perspectives during the conversation.
Share video	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Play the Finding Belonging video for participants (approximately 3:39 minutes). Encourage the participants to jot down any notes or reflections they may have while watching.
Discuss questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use the discussion questions to facilitate conversation. [Depending on the number of participants and the time allowed, consider focusing on a couple reaction and application questions or separating the group into smaller groups.] As the facilitator, you may need to ask participants to elaborate or clarify their comments, or you may need to redirect conversation and encourage all participants to engage and share.
Plan for future activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This process started the conversation about fostering a sense of belonging for all students, but it should not be the only conversation. As a group, take a minute to brainstorm and plan for future work on this topic. This work may include exploring additional resources on the topic, trying a strategy that was discussed, or spending time reflecting further using the Ten Dimensions of Belonging Reflection handout.

Additional Materials

The following links provide additional information that may be helpful to support additional work on this topic.

- [PROGRESS Center Webinar with Dr. Erik Carter on Ten Ways Schools Can Foster Belonging Among Students With and Without Disabilities](#) (1-hour recording includes link to Ten Dimensions of Belonging Reflection handout)
- [Creating Communities of Belonging for Students With Significant Cognitive Disabilities](#) (additional resources provided by the TIES Center)
- [Stories From the Classroom: Ensuring Successful Participation in School Community Events](#) (6-minute video)



Finding Belonging Discussion Questions

Reaction Questions

Question	Notes/reflection
How do you define belonging?	
From your experience, why might it be important to consider belonging, especially for students with disabilities?	
Do all students in our school, including students with disabilities, feel like they belong? Why or why not?	
Can you think of a student who may not feel as if they belong? Why do you think they may feel this way?	
Are there some groups of students who may or may not feel as if they belong? Why?	

Application Questions

Question	Notes/reflection
What are we doing well to create a sense of belonging at our school that we can use as a foundation for future work?	
In what ways could we enhance the sense of belonging at our school?	
In what ways could we enhance the sense of belonging for specific students or groups of students in our school, including students with disabilities?	
How might we enhance peer relationships to support students' sense of belonging, including students with disabilities?	



<p>How might we enhance teacher–student relationships to support students’ sense of belonging, including students with disabilities?</p>	
<p>How might we enhance our policies and procedures to facilitate a sense of belonging at our school, and especially for students with disabilities?</p>	
<p>In your role, how might you create a better sense of belonging for all students at our school, and especially for students with disabilities?</p>	

Takeaway or Next Step

As a school community, what are our priorities and next steps in creating a sense of belonging for all students, and especially for students with disabilities? How will we measure success?

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