



## Concurrent Session: Start the School Year Right by Promoting Belonging of All Students

**Riley O'Donnell:** Alrighty it looks like we're right on the top of the hour, so we will get started. So again, this is the session Starting the School Year Right by Promoting Belonging of All Students.

Before we begin, I just wanted to share a brief announcement that today's webinar will be recorded and posted on the center's website [www.promotingprogress.org](http://www.promotingprogress.org)

Participants will not be recorded as part of this webinar as all cameras and audio or disabled for everyone except our speakers and presenters today, we do have available live closed captioning.

Just a reminder that, throughout the presentation, so please keep yourself muted minimize background noise and turn on and off your video as desired.

As we said closed captioning is available, and you can click on the CC in your toolbar to access.

We will be using the chat feature, so please use that for any comments or reactions or reflection questions that we may pose.

If you run into any technical challenges, please message me directly through zoom you can send me a chat and I can assist you.

If you have any questions or comments for the presenters and you would not like anyone else to see those you can please contact the presenter directly or you can chat me as well.

So, with that I'm going to pass this over to Dr Bailey and we can begin today's session.

**Tessie Bailey:** For our last concurrent session of the prepping for progress, I'm going to just briefly introduce myself and I'm going to let Gail also introduce herself. But this is some work that the two Centers have been doing together for a period of time. But actually, this work started with the TIES Center, and we were coming in, as a so the TIES Center focuses primarily for students with more significant cognitive disabilities.

And in some of our conversations we recognized that really, we need to be promoting belonging for all students and since the PROGRESS Center focuses on K-transition in all disability categories, it seemed like a very logical partnership so we're excited I am the director of the PROGRESS Center and I'm pleased to be here with Gail.

**Gail Ghere:** Thanks Tessie and I'm Gail Ghere and I'm a researcher with the TIES Center and as Tessie mentioned, we're the national technical assistance Center on inclusive ed but the focus is primarily on kids with significant cognitive disabilities.

**Tessie Bailey:** I just want to share a little bit about what we hope to achieve today is we're going to describe some of the dimensions, that are the dimensions we've identified for promoting progress or promoting belonging for educators and students and we're going to explain why promoting belonging is so essential for kids particularly at this point in our educational careers and then we're definitely going to share a lot of resources and Riley put some links in the chat box, but you'll also find everything that we chat about today or share in the chat box on the website for prepping for progress.

Gail and I introduced ourselves, but I also want to just briefly introduce Chrissy Brown, who will be responding in the chat and sharing some things. Chrissy is the co-lead of our technical assistance, where we work directly with sites and she's been doing some of this work with some of our local educators and Riley actually helps us across the Center in terms of technical assistance, both from a universal standpoint, as well as our intensive technical assistance.

Now, before we get started, we are interested in hearing from you.

And so, what we'd like you to do is you know this idea of belonging, is probably not something that's new but it's maybe not something we've really spoken very explicitly about so I want you to think about a time when you really felt like you fit in. Like maybe it was in high school or maybe it was just recently with some of your colleagues, but what are some of those words that describe how you felt. Right, what is it like. I think about when I'm with my friends, I feel, I just feel happy, I feel like they care about me that they accept me for who I am.

What are some of the words that you that come to your mind when you think about that idea of feeling like you fit in into your community.

And if you want to unmute and share out you could do that or you can just use the chat box, I know, sometimes the chat box takes a little bit of time to type in there.

Yeah, loved, cared for, verbally welcomed. So, love it. I'm asked about. You like that they wanted to know more about you. Offered comfort items. They frequently communicated with you. Thanks and for sharing that.

Yeah, and I think that idea of love you'll actually see that's one of our last dimensions, that respect.

So, we're going to talk about really what we've identified from the research, with the help of a colleague Erik Carter at Vanderbilt.

And who's really helped identify what are some of those dimensions, because if we can define our practice, it's really hard for us to then figure out what we're going to do next.

Right, we want to move beyond the idea of belonging and really put in practice things that are essential for promoting belonging and Andrew also mentioned um about feeling included. Your participation was encouraged, or what will refer to as invited.

Now I want to share, just a brief video and Xuan is actually based out in North Carolina and one of the things that you know she has really helped us at the Center is really think about this, how do we think about belonging like what does it really mean from a student's perspective.

So she helped us create this short video, which is available for you to use and some of your work as well and, just like a lot of the things we'll share today, there are some supplemental resources around, how do you facilitate conversations, how do you really think about this in the context of your own site so I'm going to share this quick video and if somebody can just make sure you can hear it.

**Narrator:** Stories from the Classroom: Finding Belonging.

Meet Xuan, a young adult recalling her school experiences.

**Xuan:** Grade school was tough. You know my peers would be playing basketball or running track or whatever, and I would just sit on the sidelines. I just mainly watch. Some, some of my gym teachers when we played basketball, they would give me like a ball and let me throw it into a little bucket or something.

But it's still like, I still felt like I was the odd one. I didn't feel included, and I didn't feel like, I just felt left out. I was a pretty independent kid, and I was also pretty prideful kid. And I didn't want to ask for help unless I was drowning.

And then when I was drowning it was too late.

**Narrator:** While attending a youth conference with members of her church, Xuan heard a speaker discussing depression among students across America. She thought "He's talking about me." It was so powerful to her that she knew right then and there that she wanted to step out of her depression.



**Xuan:** From then on, I really fought to change my identity. I'm not just this disabled person. I am loved and I am fearfully and wonderfully made, and I tell myself this, and it's just done so much for my confidence.

**Narrator:** Soon after, her youth pastor tried to include her in an activity. She was so used to staying on the outside and not being included that she whispered to her cousin and asked her cousin to tell him that she couldn't do it. To which he said, "Why can't she?"

**Xuan:** I just remember that phrase "why can't she?" And that really stuck with me like why can't I do this, why can't I do whatever everyone else does? And so, I think it's just having those people, it doesn't need to be many, a lot of people, but just those key figures in my life that that really speak words of life and words of wisdom. And because I, as a person with disabilities, I get the word "no" all the time and it's just so refreshing when someone says, "you can do this", you just have to figure out another way.

**Narrator:** Xuan is now finishing her master's in social work while serving on the university's Disability Advisory Board and running a student organization called Indivisible that centers around disabilities. That gift that each one of us has it's, not just for us, it's for other people too.

**Tessie Bailey:** So, I'm curious you know, to the extent to which that resonates with you, right. It's sometimes, it's easier for us to identify the things that we're not belonging, right like we can definitely articulate when we're not, but really trying to clarify what it means to belong, and I think that's what she's Xuan was chatting about.

So, in the link or in the chat box you'll see the link to that video along with some of the other resources, so if you want to share some of that with your colleagues.

If you want to end up, you know doing a faculty meeting around it that's something you can do with those resources.

Now, in the keynote yesterday we really talked about this path for progress and what does that look like and what you'll notice is that belonging is one of the dimensions that we added as part of our work in collaboration with the TIES Center and with Erik Carter.

You know, initially, we think we've thought about special education is the instructional services, the specially designed instruction, the accommodation, supporting educators.

But while we recognize that that, even if that instruction is of high quality and teachers do feel like they have the resources and a good schedule.

It doesn't really mean that we're going to get the effects, because if kids don't feel like they belong they're less likely to benefit from the services and supports that we provide.

The same thing is for teachers and educators right, we want to make sure that part of that infrastructure, the ecosystem that we build really promotes belonging for all of those that are participating in that community.

Now this idea of belonging, is it's not really new, but I think what's new is the way that we're talking about it. That we're able to define what it means in comparison to what we may have previously been doing.

So, if you look at exclusion, you know prior to IDEA in most cases individuals with disabilities were fully excluded meaning you didn't even see them in the community, they weren't even present and then we started to see them, you know, a greater effort to include students, but they were often segregated with other students that were very similar in terms of needs.

And then we think about the integration is where we started to see special schools move their classes into let's say a neighborhood school and they're integrating the classroom in there, but kids are often not really part of the general school experience, although they might be in the same sort of vicinity or same proximity is their peers.

Now, over the last 25 years or so we've been really focusing on inclusion and a lot of that has led to some great work and how do we include individuals with disabilities in the instructional content within the physical classroom and although our efforts have led to a greater access for students with disabilities, they often didn't really promote this sense of belonging and was almost as if kids with disabilities were allowed to come in right or they earned their way in by developing those skills and, if you look to the overall community you could definitely pick out who was, you know who had a disability versus who did not. And so, we think about this visual representation of belonging, we can't really tell who's who because the disability is not the defining characteristic and what it means is every kid in that community brings their unique self, right and we learn to work with each other and function and get ourselves the supports that we need to be part of that community.

And so, what's happened is this clarification of trying to, of defining those dimensions and the work that's happened over the last couple of years has really helped us sort of clarify what that message is, and I think, you know, more than ever, we really need to be promoting the sense of belonging, not just for students with disabilities but technically all of the students and the families and the educators that are within our community. We need to make sure that students feel that they're supported, that they're seen, they're heard, and they're understood by the adults that there that are in their schools and communities.

Now, before I pass this over to Gail, I just want to orient you to some resources that we will be referring to today throughout our session.

This work, as I mentioned started with the TIES Center in collaboration with Erik Carter from Vanderbilt and then has really expanded on with the work of the PROGRESS Center and that's because each of us has different target audiences and we want to make sure that regardless of your entry point, that we are promoting belonging across our sites, and so what you'll see across all of our resources is you know this idea of you know, being reflective. What are we doing really well? What should we be doing a lot better? and what could we be doing next, right? And that's what we're going to talk about is across those 10 dimensions. What should it look like, or what are we seeing that it looks like based on, you know the students that we're working with, and what are some strategies and resources, you can use for promoting belonging in your schools? So, I'm going to pass this over to Gail who's going to really get us into understanding the dimensions.

**Gail Ghere:** So, thanks for that. When Tessie and I were putting together the PowerPoint I love that she put in the beginning, that where she asked the question to you about what does it, you know the question of what did it feel like when you fit in. Because we can, we know, I mean we know as humans, when we feel comfortable in a situation where we belong, but it's sometimes when we don't have the opposite to, and do you, you know, often if you don't feel like you belong you don't want to go back to that situation.

But often what it's really hard to put that in the words and you guys started that in terms of talking like verbally welcomed and included and just feeling respected and stuff. So those are, you're going to see the words that you've put in the chat, in these dimensions today.

But also, if we can understand the dimensions, then we can figure out ways to, actions that we can take to make a difference, on behalf of students and so that's where this goes is in terms of what can we do with it.

After we understand it, that really lead to like Tessie said, creating that environment where kids want to be, so they learn, because we know when we're comfortable and we're engaged, we learned.

As Tessie mentioned this came from comes from the work of Erik Carter out of Vanderbilt and Erik, he went through a series of about interviewing about 500 families and these families had to have students with cognitive disabilities and what he started just asking them about questions of belonging and as they talked and talked he was able to pull from that when they felt they belong what were the pieces that were there, and so what we want to do is go through and use it and then think today how that applies.

So, the first domain will, and we'll go through all these one there, so you don't be afraid that we haven't sent them all, because we'll get through today.

So, the first dimension is being present and being present isn't enough you can't just be physically present in a class. I think some of our early efforts around inclusion, we included students by having them present in the class, but they weren't as they weren't engaged with the learning.

But that be at that you have to be present it's almost like a foundational piece, you have to be present to belong to something you have to be there, and if you're there, then you can be more engaged so it's really learning. And the other thing is, the more areas that we're present in the more we learn how to interrelate to each other, because we meet different people in those areas or we see commonalities of kids across them and we can figure out how to react different in different places, how do you engage with people.

And so, when you think about kids with disabilities and as Tessie said we focus on mostly kids with significant cognitive disabilities, but you can't do them to the exclusion of everyone you're thinking about all kids.

You know, our, when you look at across your classroom your school your district, do you see kids with disabilities? Are they present in all environments? So, are they in the general education classrooms are they in the extracurricular and your clubs do they do, they follow the routines of the school? So, for instance, to when kids, all the students arrive, are they part of the group of all the students that arrived in that door, or they coming into separate door at a different time? And so, the piece of presence is one of the, is foundational and that's why it's the first it's the first dimension.

And if you look at, I mean it's, if you look at who's in our schools, right now, about one in seven students and children in your school have a disability about 15% and that varies across states and districts, but on the whole, that that is kind of an average of kind of falls out. So, we know that, you know, we know that if you look across, we need to be very conscious of the students, they make up a sizable portion of our student population.

And, but if you look across if you look at this slide here and look at nationwide data on where students with disabilities are being educated it's quite variable depending on their disability. Overall, if you look at all students together, all these disabilities together there's about 62% who spend 80% or more of their school day in the general education classroom, but if you, but that is quite different, if you have a child, with a speech disability, because language disability they're up there. But if you look at students with intellectual disabilities or multiple disabilities they're more in the tens.

And so, we have, we have not figured out and we continue to work on is how do we have students be present in the general education environment with their peers and be successful there. And as an

aside, just for our kids who have significant cognitive disabilities, this is really important for belonging, but it also is really important, because we have a huge research to practice gap around educating students in inclusive environments and the students with significant cognitive disabilities who are taught in inclusive environments have greater outcomes in every area that you would look at academics, communication, social emotional, but also lifelong outcomes in terms of their choices and ability to do things post school. So, it's, so as we look at that we have a lot of work to do. So, when you look at your environment be thinking about, are all our kids included, are they, I mean are all of our kids present and also there's a lot of variation across states in terms of that last chart in terms of percentage of students who are with their peers most or all of the day.

In terms of students with intellectual disabilities, it can vary between 80% of the students are in their gen-ed classes 80% or more of the day to 20%.

And so, you really have to think about Okay, what are our systems, you know what the policies are written or unwritten we have in place what our expectations for students.

Because if we have low expectations that we might assume that that environment is not going to be beneficial for them, and if they're not building that sense of belonging, which is core to learning is not happening either. So as Tessie mentioned there's a reflection sheet that's part of both of the Center's tools and I think it's really helpful because just in a very you know it's a one pager to sit there and think about for each dimension.

Where am I seeing strengths in my school? Where am I seeing, we can do better in our school? And what are some thinking about, what some actionable steps are, to do. It's like, how do you break this down into something that's doable?

And so, take a moment right here and think about the dimension of being present and then maybe I'm either you know, put your hand up I guess we'll do that or put a note in the chat about what are some strengths, you see, in your current environment around students, about students being present and involved in all these settings and places across the school day as their peers and then where do you see it be absent?

**Tessie Bailey:** I think you're muted and Gail while we're waiting for folks, to put it there's a question in the chat box. It's really around the study that was done with the 500 families that were interviewed and so folks are curious the extent to which nonnative English speaker families were included within the study. Are you there they're not able to access the study because it's in a journal, but do you have to know right off hand the extent to which...

**Gail Ghere:** I don't know the answer to that. I'm sorry. That's a great question, though, because I think belonging is, I mean when we're thinking about kids here we're thinking about all children and one of



the pieces you'll see in the dimension that's coming up is support and one of the pieces around support for families to be engaged too and so it's, it may be language support, so might, you know that they have their able, through their whole language to express themselves. I think it's a great question. I don't know the answer to yeah.

**Tessie Bailey:** And it makes me think I see and Martha, I mean this, this is one of those areas, you know from the PROGRESS Center, we are working with our partnership sites to learn more about the application and, as I mentioned Gail's work started with kids with low incidence disabilities and we're really sort of expanding it and I'd be curious the extent to which is you look at the dimensions which of those may not be relevant to nonnative speaker English speakers and then, if you know, are those that maybe are missing, that we need to consider, because I think our learning changes right, I mean just the fact that we're talking about this is an evolution in the way that we've thought about education over the last, especially since no child left behind my opinion.

**Gail Ghore:** Yeah, so Martha said languages of barriers is crucial. Yes, for sure. I mean it makes it's a difference between parents feeling welcome in addition to the students being welcoming so it's a piece, we as a system need to continue to grow and prioritize.

So, think about that and think about that reflection sheet let's move on to the second dimension and the second dimension is to be invited so remember your present but that's not enough. We learn that early and inclusive ed where we had students that were physically there but not engaged with learning it as almost like the getting the students in the door of gen ed was the was the goal and that was not sufficient enough. So when you're invited, what happens? I mean, are you invited by both peers in that environment and the adults in that environment and are the invitations prolific are they just part of who we are. Do kids invite other kids to sit next to them in the cafeteria? Do, are adults seeking out students with disabilities to be on leadership teams, to join extracurriculars, to come work with them at a table? These are all invitations and when you're invited you feel like you, I mean if someone has like shine a spotlight on you and said hey, I want you to be there; I want you to come join us. It feels good. It's a door opening that gives you the kind of, kind of sometimes the courage to walk through and know that when you go there if you're invited you probably be supported. That someone's expecting you to be there.

And so, when we look, but when we look at some of the data that comes out, and this is comes from the national longitudinal study from several years ago it when they asked high school students who had different disabilities to what extent they had been invited to social activity in the past 12 months, you can see the breakdown. Students with autism said they had not been invited to a social activity. Kids with intellectual disabilities and one out of four and they had not, and you can see the percentages of us not helping to create that on ramp for kids to come in and feel like they're like they're belonging.

So I think, and I would I don't know recent data, but I would say that that still is an issue that we need to keep thinking about that in order to have students feel like they belong. So you want invitations that are you know prevalent there in the environment. You want them from both peers and adults. So as peers, as students, see adults inviting kids they start to invite you, the fact that somebody invites a student with a disability to participate in a table at an activity and is and helps them to support them, kids are watching. They want the adults and what they're doing and that reduces fear that reduces the unknown. They feel like, a little more comfortable that they could do something too, so that it creates another way and then also it's a way to really, you know, engage our families a whole lot more.

So, again on the reflection sheet, you would sit there, and you said you were kind of thinking, the same way, to what extent when I'm thinking about this specific environment, do we pause and reflect—ask about are we inviting kids to participate in things and where are we inviting and our third group of kids who are not being invited.

And how do we if that's something that we're seeing, what we might do to make a difference around that? And we reflect on that both in the classroom level, all the way up to the district, and the school and district levels.

**Tessie Bailey:** It came up in the last session and I did get a private chat, so I just want to share this.

You know, we often think about that inviting—is that the student with a disability, has to make those changes or they need to do something different, and I know this, we have this little thing here is, are we providing students, the skills and opportunities, this this could be you know, are we helping students without disabilities understand right, what does it mean to invite, right. It maybe, it looks different and to engage in those conversations and activities with their peers without disabilities. So, I just wanted to mention that.

**Gail Ghere:** Yeah, it's a great point in terms of modeling, but you know beyond modeling just explicit instruction about you know in our classroom we're going to invite our partners to work with us and things like that. How are we going to do that?

And I forgot to mention, there was a great example that came up recently—and some work we're doing in Washington State they are moving from having their students with significant extensive needs from being a cluster sites back to their neighborhood schools—and so one principal had reached out to a parent and invited them to come and see the school. And no response. Didn't want to come and so anyways on the third call the parents said, “You really do want me to come, you I thought you were just calling and inviting me because the district told you, you needed to call and invite me.”

And so, I mean parents and students, we all recognize authenticity and this principal was persistent saying we want you to be part of this community. We want the way you, you are invited, but we want



you to belong here and we want to you, we want you to feel comfortable here and so that is a way to you know— be thinking about how this looks as we open our doors to other people.

So, and as mentioned, the power of the reflection to help me and adults, think about our own behaviors, great point. A lot of our reflection starts with ourselves before we go out, we're inward before outward that's a great point.

And so, the third dimension is welcomed. And this is like, to what extent families and students feel am they're greeted, and they're treated when they're in that environment. Is it, kind of goes back to that example I just shared—are they being they greeted with warmth; do they feel like an authentic joy that people are happy that they're there?

And, once again, you know when you create that. that's what students will model with, they can model with other students in addition to kind of just having it, this is our community, this is what we do in our community.

But it's interesting if you look at some other data that Erik Carter gathered, this data, he looked at, observed in classes for 100 over 100 students within high school and some of these students have intellectual disabilities and he was just looking at, to what extent they were present and proximal in the classroom. So if we're talking about welcome and think about the routines we have where we welcome people when they walk in the door, we welcome, we say goodbye when people are leaving, we say hello, and welcome and engage with them at natural times of the day.

And so, what happened here was, you can see that just from the curve of the, of the graph that the students with intellectual disabilities entered the class late, left classes early and, to a great extent, most of them were sitting with adults during the time of the period of the of the classroom.

So, these students were not present at the natural times of the day when you would do your natural welcoming.

And you know that, lots of times in classes, depending on how the classes run your kind of if you come in late, you kind of slip in and just kind of try to figure out the flow of the class and fit right in.

But then again, you are really to a great extent more dependent on the adult who's going to help you catch up on what needs to be done, then your peers, so it's hard to feel welcome when you're in and out. And this is another study that was done 30 years ago and just the title of it will get you.

So one of the things we can do as we think about strategy, this is really look at, shadow the kids and see are they there, are they coming and going with the flow of a school day, with the routines of the school day, and are they, you know to what extent are or are we having to have them have such a



differentiated schedule and maybe that's more because of the adults needs than the kids needs—that we have really not set the stage for them to be in a situation where they're present enough or they're welcomed and they can see them as belonging to a class more than just as a visitor to a class.

And Martha you said authenticity or more let's see more presence in some cultures than others it's an interesting topic that is interesting.

**Tessie Bailey:** yeah, and so I think what and Martha maybe is mentioning is what that looks like maybe different based on the culture and correct me if I'm wrong guys, so I think there was some conversations about that. So, yeah and I think part of that is, you know, going into the next dimension is being known.

Right is that is that do you really know, you know the student's disability per se.

But the students and you know them as a unique individual their family, their culture and, are they appreciated for that sort of uniqueness or individualization that they bring to the table, and I think this is, we talked about this in our last session is that if we think about students with disabilities within our school, how are they often known. And I had shared that you know, I have a child, with significant behavioral disabilities, which, which are much different now, but he was known by his behavior, he was known by his actions versus, you know the strengths and the experiences that he had brought to the table, and it really interfered with a school experience. So if you think about the kids in your school, do you often say things like oh that's a special education kid or that's the tier two or tier three kid.

Then what it means is adults, we're modeling that students are known by these characteristics, which are often deficit based characteristics, and so we have to be very clear around, how do we help students know their peers, right. Ad one of the things we talked about in the last session is you know when school starts right when you're getting your, you know your year up and running, that first week or two is really the greatest opportunity for kids to know each other and we often feel this pressure to jump right into academics, or you know to hurry up and get to the pretest or the screening, but really the greatest impact that we're going to see is giving kids opportunity to be known.

And to know their peers, right. And as Gail mentioned, you know if you have kids coming and going, and you know they go to their special education services during that opportunity, they often don't get to be known by their peers or their often known as the kid who comes and goes. And so, when you think about that consideration of being known within your school is, are we treating kids as unique individuals who are valued for what they bring, are appreciated for who they are, right, not just for the characteristics that we often view.

And so, think about as you started plan for your school year what opportunities are you providing both for your students, but, for your families, right, to be known. And you know, for their unique

characteristics, and so I think about this next dimension or around accepted is it's very similar, and I think that's, you know they there is a lot of overlap. And I know in previous conversations, they would say like Gail was saying well you know to be present, they also there's a difference between present, meaning the teacher pushed them in versus being invited right that's a very different dimension, but they interact with each other and accepted is the very same thing—is that are we accepting kids you know, for without condition for who they are, right. They don't need to earn their way into that classroom or that way into that experience that they are general education students first.

They have the same opportunity and what we're doing in special education is providing the supports which Gail will talk about in a minute, so that they can be successful, but they should be accepted unconditionally.

And one of the challenges that we see in the field right now is there is a persistent low expectation for students with disabilities. I mentioned this yesterday in the keynote, but I know, in a study at it in 2013, sadly, we found that even when kids had the same behaviors and the same context, when they were labeled as a student with disability, we saw a persistent lower expectation, both by families and by the teachers and that's something that's going to change the way right that we promote belonging for students. If we have those lower expectations, then we sometimes have lower expectations for their opportunities to be part of or accepted within our community.

So, Gail, I don't know if you wanted to add something.

**Gail Ghere:** No, I look at that all the time and I always, I always feel bad because we know that, I mean it's not just research, it's everything else that we know that when we expect more of kids they rise to that and they learn more and so it always is one of those things that I just, you're right it's just out there, but it's one of those things that is actually bothers me quite a bit.

**Tessie Bailey:** Yeah and I think if we're doing that self-reflection, and we think about our you know this dimension of acceptance— you know for seeing these sort of statements or hearing these sort of statements in our classroom—then we're probably you know have some areas for improvement that this is, this is a place where we can think about you know. I mean we don't have to have an inclusive classroom kids should be included, regardless right.

We don't have to have that program in our school, and I know that we might not be able to change things right away, but what we're looking at is how do we promote this belonging by making these systemic changes within our system for that.

And so you know I think about this, this idea of acceptance, you know, this is, this is a challenge right, this is sometimes our beliefs going into it, both from families and from educators and policymakers, as you mentioned Gail, but sometimes from peers. I think you heard that from Billy Pickens who was on



the panel is that even he sort of saw that as he wasn't supposed to be accepted, because of certain characteristics that was the belief that was there.

And so, this might be an area where you can think about how we can do things differently and a little bit better, and I know we talked a lot about support it and I think this is one of those dimensions that really help us think about how we can move the needle for belonging.

**Gail Ghere:** Yeah, I think I mean one of the one of the things that's true is that we all have capabilities, but we don't do things on our own. We've all had supports in order to let our strengths, you know really guide where we are even professionally and where we are you come into a job, you're supported in order to do well in that.

And so, one of the pieces that comes out around the dimensions of you know, belonging is that, just think about that the absence of support is actually exclusion for kids with significant or kids with disabilities. Now kids with disabilities have variable needs in terms of the support they need. Some of them may just need some periodic additional support. Some of them may need extensive support across all the day, across all their learning domains. But the pieces, that if we can really identify, do you understand, personally—I have person centered learning— what they need in order to have support and have them there, we can increase their participation and belonging. Not only in school for learning the learning pieces, but also their participation in clubs and extracurricular and just the day-to-day routines.

So that's kind of a piece, I think one of the one of the probably one of the challenges, I'll put it right out there that happens when we think about our kids with significant cognitive disabilities as you think that, in order to have students be in more inclusive settings, it has to be a paraprofessional with them a one-on-one paraprofessional in many cases.

And what we've stood back is that we stood back and looked at the schedules and how we're using our resources, often we have, well we're not sometimes using our resources in the most efficient and effective manner.

And I don't know about you, but I've walked into classrooms where there are four and five adults in a classroom and you know 20 kids. It's like you go something's wrong with this picture, you know, and when it happened was special ed had done their scheduling the EI department had done their scheduling, title one had somebody else coming in, and nobody had looked across all the supports to understand, how, in this area, doing and how are they working together.

So one of the pieces, where we look at supports is who are the adults and how can we use them more effectively, but then another one that's very powerful is the use of national supports, which are your peers and how do you help peers become as part of as part of belonging and as a part of a what we



know about effective learning is have them support their classmates to be successful, and you know whether regardless of an academic or out in the playground, or between transitions and whatever, and so this is another resource it's on the TIES Center and it really looks at the peer mediated strategies, evidence based strategies, that help you map out how to, which peer mediated strategy would be best given your situation and how would you implement that. Like what does it look like? What are the steps you have to do? What kind of training would be needed? And it kind of lays it out not a recipe, but in enough that you could take it and apply it to your setting. But there's an addition to that—on the link you'll see a decision making guide for choosing which engagement strategy. It's a little overwhelming when I look at these like there's nine engagement strategies and I go, which peer engagement strategy, when I choose for which one. So it allows you to create multiple filters there in terms of age, location, what's the impact you're trying to go for, and then the list can be narrowed down to say three to four, and you can sit there and identify okay of those which might be the best or maybe I need two strategies, given the situation I'm at different times of the day, or locations to achieve what we want to do.

So, it's a piece of how we provide supports in multiple ways, so that we are actually as we do this, we're increasing belonging I mean there's nothing more powerful than friendships, pure friendships, and so how do we move that.

And then, as part of the PROGRESS Centers work, they've got this they've linked to this great series on the self-determination series.

And it's where students are learning about themselves, they learn about their own need and become, and they find their voice to support them to say, what supports do I need in this environment to be successful and to show you and to learn.

And so, or to belong, and so this is a piece in other ways that can kind of help you map that out and do it and do the professional development around that so that you can then build that into you know teaching the students. And as we talked about in the last session, to me this is like every day.

This is stuff that your students without disabilities are doing and guidance they're teaching kids how to recognize, you know their own supports what they need, how do they have their voice to say what they need, and to make choices.

And so, this it flows in it easily could be integrated with other pieces of that inclusive homeroom setting if you're up in the high school, middle school ages.

So, the next piece, and that actually the piece around self-determination and voice fits well with this, the next dimension that the seventh dimension is being heard and this is where your voice is there, your listened to, your respected. People asks your opinions about things.



Because you know that when people listen to you and hear you, it shines a light. I know it's like being invited. It's like you know that they've opened the door for you to be there and belong and be part of the conversation, and you get a way to amplify what you care about, and so this is kind of a piece, as you think about this dimension is think about who's being heard in in your school, whose voices are being heard and whose voices are not being heard?

And how can we amplify the voices that are not being heard across the day? Like again, we're talking classroom, we're talking all kinds of clubs and extracurricular too. But I want to show an example of this, and it's an example of a secondary students who has a significant disability and he has been through multiple means of communication, is going to share what's important to him.

In what he wants in his IEP. So this is his IEP meeting. He communicates through four different means. He mixes together, he got an AC device, uses an iPad, he has the vocal, he gestures. You'll see him pointing at different teachers around the table as there is what he talked about comes up on his iPad.

And then you'll also see him sign. He does some minimal signing, but together, he is able to be heard in his IEP and have an impact on what his school year looks like. This is also a student who's been in an inclusive program.

The woman sitting next to the student was his mom. This was the first time he had done this in an IEP meeting, that he had been able to that he and really had that presence to do that, and they have really focused on that, through his means that multiple means of communication.

And the pieces that were written that he talked about were written into his IEP and he they use small whiteboards across the day, and his peers learn to help him through academics on those whiteboards—to help them about key terms of vocabulary to use. So they really did integrate his voice into his IEP, I mean he was heard and that is a crucial piece of belonging.

**Tessie Bailey:** Being heard is also being heard by his mom right, so they the school and the parent the mom who's sitting next to him all working together. So that there's it's not just being heard at school, but just being heard in school and in the community. So I know we just have a couple of minutes left and I just want to just briefly share, about the last ones.

And you'll see that there really are intertwined like belonging is this, you know construct that has these individual parts to it that we can explicitly teach skills to promote better belonging or more appropriate belonging, but being friends with somebody—and you heard that from him in his video, like he wants more friends—it's part of the school experience. It's part of being a citizen or a member of a community.



And we know that you know when we are alone and Xuan mentioned this at the very beginning, you know we can experience things like depression—which is more common among individuals with disabilities. It didn't really help with that and we know that, together, as I mentioned yesterday too we're stronger right, we're rich, we're able to weather some of these challenges, and we know that there are some students with certain types of character, you know behavioral characteristics are sometimes with the labels that come with their IDEA eligibility is that are less likely, you know to feel part of that friendship, right, to have those same opportunities, and so one of the things to think about is a friendship formula which aligns with some of the dimensions that we talked about.

You know this proximity piece is what Gail mentioned about the presence, right. That you're physically present. You've got to be around students. That idea of being welcomed within the situation in which you're in, but one of the things that we also control a part of this is, the frequency and duration and if we don't provide those opportunities for kids to interact and build friendships, right, they just don't happen during 15 minutes in recess, right. They sort of happen over a school day over a school, schooling experience. So we have to be thoughtful not just about our academic frequency and duration instruction that we're providing but also the opportunities to be able to be engaged with their peers without disabilities and that intensity is important. If it's superficial and you know the peer is standing right next to the kid, you're probably not going to get the appropriate intensity for authentic friendships to develop.

And, along with that is this idea of feeling needed and I think all of us go into this field, because we want to feel like we're part of something.

We want to feel like our presence is needed, right. It's not that we're just being allowed to be there, but that we need to be there in order for us to be whole and so it's that idea of how we demonstrate value.

How do we promote that all individuals have value that we need each other to be able to be a complete society or a complete school community?

And I think Xuan mentioned this to in her video is that idea of feeling love. And a couple of folks mentioned it in the chat box in both sessions, is that we really feel like we're part of something that people care that we're there, they care when we're not there, and that's really a bigger piece around as adults, we can establish those experiences we can model, those for the students in our class.

But and this is a good time, as we start to look at our school schedule like Gail mentioned are we promoting those opportunities for us, you know, establishing these friends and this opportunities for engagement.



And so, as we come back to this image, you know we think about you know we're not there yet, in many cases we have some places to go the resources that we shared can really help us identify our strengths and maybe some areas of improvement. So that we can really move to that that promotion of belonging across our school and before we share out some last-minute resources.

I just want to do a quick reflection and what we refer to as a chatter fall.

Thinking about the 10 dimensions that we shared which one of them really resonated with you or really is going to be the focus of maybe the work that you do this year and I would like you to put that in the chat box. Don't press enter and we'll do that in about five seconds, but think about that, like gosh I really need to make sure that I focus on students being known or welcomed within my school. Alright, so let me give about three more seconds and on the count of three you're just going to click enter.

So, let's say 3,2,1 go. Let's see what you got and needed, known, the friendship formula that's great yeah that feeling loved I think we all have these areas that are being befriended.

And so, we're just going to close up with some resources to help you move forward, but I also want to say that you know both Centers are here to really help you in this work, so please contact us but Gail I'm going to pass it over to you.

**Gail Ghere:** So, I mean the great thing is one of the great things is behind the scenes there's been links put in the chat throughout, which is an awesome support.

But then, in addition to that there's a parallel set of resources on the TIES Center around creating communities for belonging.

And this is really like you said particular focuses for students with significant cognitive disabilities.

Each of these dimensions, has a mini guide and it's meant it's not like they say, like a recipe, but it helps you to get a snapshot of what this would look like in a school and then some steps you might be able to take to you know, create change in the in the event at dimension in your environment so it's a starting place a place to go.

And then there's an accompanying reflection tool that really is which you saw throughout, and that was just kind of, we got to thinking about that, for your own environment so that you're just familiar with the tool and it might be something to use with the whole school of team, or just individually by yourself.



But as Tessie mentioned one of the great things is just starting out the first week and look at look at these dimensions as kids are entering the building and where they are and if the situation is set up for them to be long or what can, what can we do to go from there and coming back from Covid it is so important, this belonging piece. So how do we create that culture.

**Tessie Bailey:** Well, I want to thank you all for participating in our session, and we look forward to continuing this conversation around, how do we promote belonging. Not only for our students but also for our families and our educators within our school, so please stay connected with us, and if you have any feedback or stories you'd like to share, we would love to hear them so thanks everybody and we'll see what the closing session that starts in about I think 10 minutes or 15 minutes.