Creating Spaces of Belonging for Staff & Students
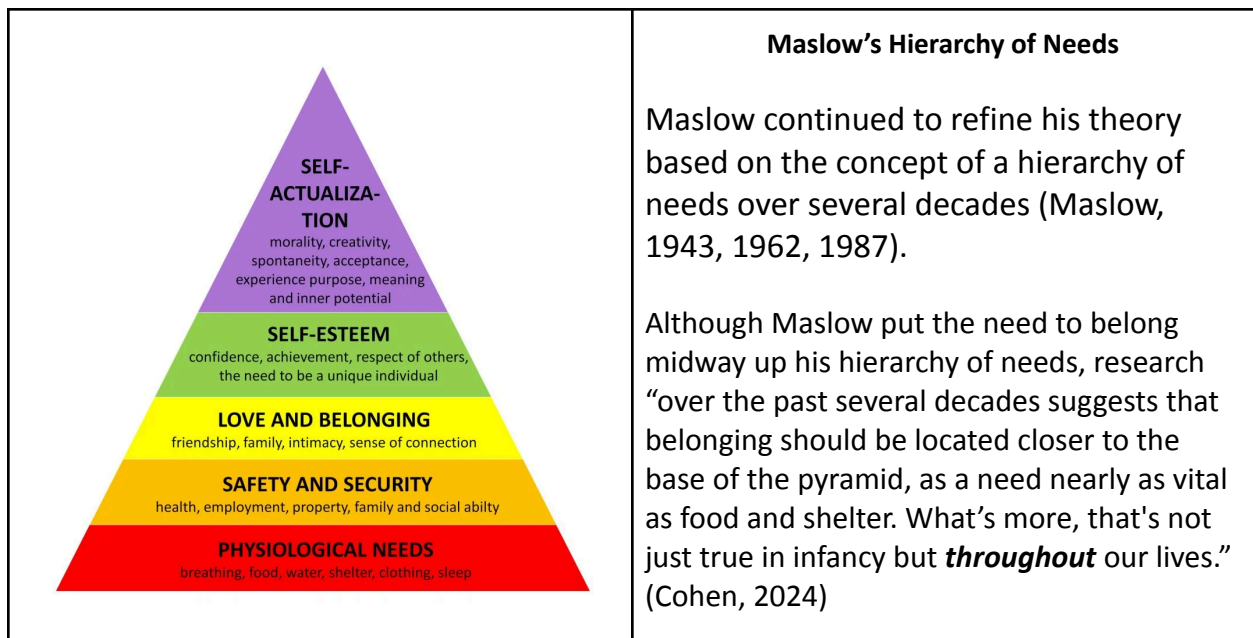
MO SW-PBS Summer Institute 2025

3 Human Psychological Needs (Remember C-A-R)

Self-determination theory identifies 3 needs individuals must fulfill to behave with *__intrinsic motivation__*:

- **Competence**
  - *Succeeding in what is to be done, belief in one's ability to succeed, and/or self-efficacy.*

- **Autonomy**
  - *Being in control of one's life, self-determination.*

- **Relatedness**
  - *Connecting with others, **belonging.***

(Ryan & Deci, 2000)

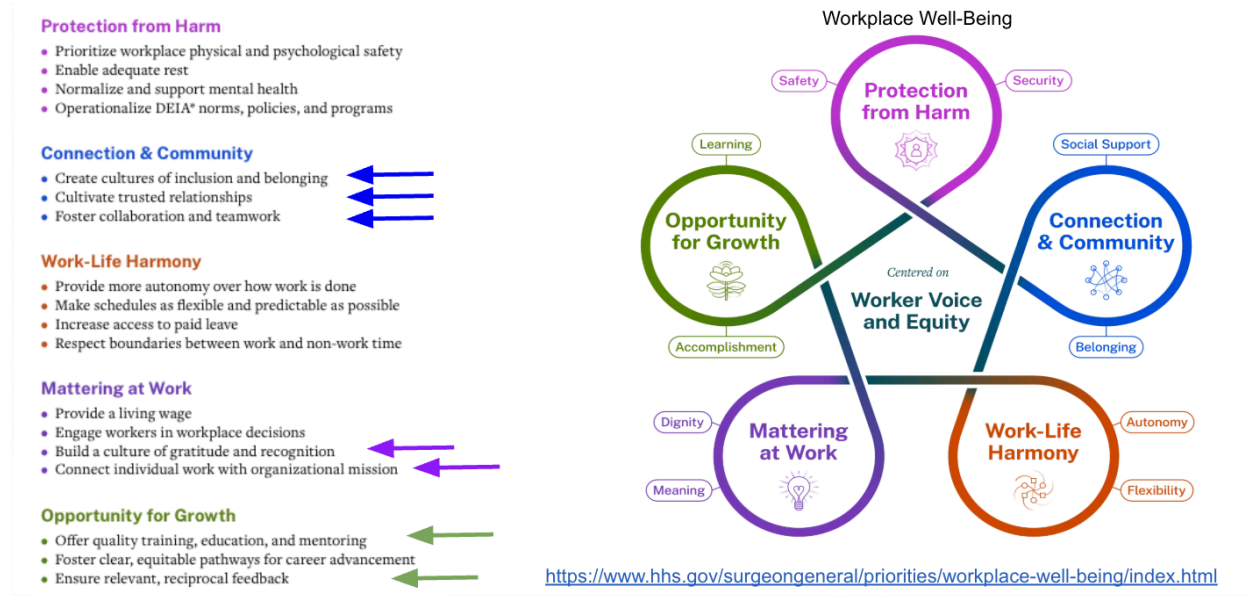|	
	Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Maslow continued to refine his theory based on the concept of a hierarchy of needs over several decades (Maslow, 1943, 1962, 1987). Although Maslow put the need to belong midway up his hierarchy of needs, research "over the past several decades suggests that belonging should be located closer to the base of the pyramid, as a need nearly as vital as food and shelter. What's more, that's not just true in infancy but ***throughout*** our lives." (Cohen, 2024)

- **Belonging**
  - "...the subjective feeling of deep connection with social groups, physical places, and individual and collective experiences—is a fundamental human need that predicts numerous mental, physical, social, economic, and behavioural outcomes." (Allen, Kern, Rozek, McInerney, Slavich, 2021)

- **Belonging Uncertainty**
  - "The term '***belonging uncertainty'*** refers to the feeling that we all encounter in different social environments where we're not really sure if we belong or not. If you're a member of a marginalized group, belonging uncertainty can be a chronic condition." (Cohen, 2022)

Belonging Continuum

Belonging ⟵⟶ Belonging Uncertainty

- **Stereotype Threat** (internal state)
  - Degree of anxiety about how an individual thinks they are being perceived due to a ***stereotype***. (Cohen, 2022)

- **Fundamental Attribution Error** (FAE) (external threat)
  - Impulsive cognitive bias that leads us to see the behavior of others as emanating from some underlying essence - who the person is - rather than from the situation they are in. (Cohen, 2022)

- **Loneliness**
  - "...is the ***subjective feeling*** that you're lacking the social connections you need." (Murthy, 2020)
    - ***Intimate***, or emotional, loneliness is the longing for a close confidant or intimate partner.
    - ***Relational,*** or social, loneliness is the yearning for quality friendships and social companionship and support.
    - ***Collective*** loneliness is the hunger for a network or community of people who share your sense of purpose or interests.

- **Isolation**
  - "...the objective physical state of being alone and out of touch with other people." (Murthy, 2020)

- **Solitude**
  - "... the state of peaceful aloneness or voluntary isolation."
  - "It is an opportunity for self-reflection and a chance to connect with ourselves without distraction or disturbance." (Murthy, 2020)

- **Situation Crafting**
  - "Shaping a situation, even in seemingly minor ways, in order to foster belonging." (Cohen, 2022)

- **Wise Interventions**
  - "Wise interventions are ideally the right small thing, just what is psychologically needed for a specific person in a specific time and place to set them on a better path."
  - "...are only tools for situation crafting… none of them is a one-off solution… in an environment with genuine opportunities they have cumulative effects. " (Cohen, 2022)

- **Wise Criticism**
  - Praising a students' potential (you can meet my high expectations) rather than their CURRENT performance. (Cohen, 2022)

STAFF BELONGING

Workplace Well-Being

Protection from Harm
- Prioritize workplace physical and psychological safety
- Enable adequate rest
- Normalize and support mental health
- Operationalize DEIA* norms, policies, and programs

Connection & Community
- Create cultures of inclusion and belonging
- Cultivate trusted relationships
- Foster collaboration and teamwork

Work-Life Harmony
- Provide more autonomy over how work is done
- Make schedules as flexible and predictable as possible
- Increase access to paid leave
- Respect boundaries between work and non-work time

Mattering at Work
- Provide a living wage
- Engage workers in workplace decisions
- Build a culture of gratitude and recognition
- Connect individual work with organizational mission

Opportunity for Growth
- Offer quality training, education, and mentoring
- Foster clear, equitable pathways for career advancement
- Ensure relevant, reciprocal feedback

Safety · Security · Learning · Social Support · Protection from Harm · Connection & Community · Opportunity for Growth · Centered on Worker Voice and Equity · Accomplishment · Belonging · Dignity · Mattering at Work · Work-Life Harmony · Autonomy · Meaning · Flexibility

https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/priorities/workplace-well-being/index.html

- **Explicit invitations**
  - The intentionally planned for, concrete, well defined strategy or interventions that you are implementing with, or for group members to create opportunities for belonging to be experienced. (Vogl, 2020)

- **Implicit invitations**
  - Implied, subtle signals that are sent without careful consideration or planning that can forge either belonging and connection or disconnection. Bias can be a determinate of the impacts of implicit interventions. (Vogl, 2020)

"**School culture** encompasses the **shared values, beliefs,** and **practices** within the school community." (*explicit*)

"**School climate** refers to the overall atmosphere, including the physical and emotional safety of the students and staff." (*implicit*)

Explicit Interventions	
The intentionally planned for, concrete, well defined strategy or interventions that you are implementing with, or for group members to create opportunities for belonging to be experienced. (Vogl, 2020)	
Values Affirmation Activities > Taking a step back and reminding yourself of the values you stand for.	- Connecting the individual to organizational Mission – Vision – Values – Goals (MVVG) > See Center School District Example - All staff have a voice in DW and SW expectations & rules.
My notes:	
Mentoring Mindset > Normalizing that growing or engaging in new experiences can	Share stories of adversity, the jittery "firsts feelings", the self-talk that isn't always helpful and how YOU combat it with more

be challenging. What are the long term rewards of doing hard things?	positive scripts. ● Transparency / Questioning / Stress Response / Purpose Getting / Belonging
My notes:	
Teaming > Is EVERYONE part of THE Organizational Team and on an EFFECTIVE Team?	● Onboarding rituals ● Branding opportunities ● Celebrations ● Level of Participation
My notes:	
Psychological Safety > W/out Safety you people aren't truly present to contribute **& "Perspective Getting" >** Rather than trying to guess what it is like to be in someone's shoes you ASK them instead.	● Fearless Organization Scan ● Social Validity Survey / Interviews. ● Listening sessions 1. **Ask, Don't Assume**: Instead of projecting your own ideas or assumptions onto someone else's experience, the strategy emphasizes **asking open-ended questions** to better understand how they see things. 2. **Listen Actively and Nonjudgmentally**: The goal is not to debate or correct, but to genuinely listen. You're not trying to change the other person's mind but to understand it. 3. **Clarify and Reflect**: As the person speaks, the listener should **paraphrase or summarize** what was said to ensure understanding. This helps the speaker feel heard and encourages more open conversation. 4. **Build Connection Through Understanding**: By demonstrating true curiosity and empathy, the listener often builds trust and reduces defensiveness—even when there is deep disagreement. 5. **Emphasis on Interpersonal Contact**: Cohen's research shows that even brief, respectful interactions that focus on **understanding the other's perspective** can significantly **reduce polarization**, especially in political or ideological conflicts.
My notes:	

Implicit Invitations	
Implied, subtle signals that are sent without careful consideration or planning that can forge either belonging and connection or disconnection. Bias can be a determinate of the impacts of implicit interventions. (Vogl, 2020)	
Representation The degree to which all community members are visible and valued.	● All communication for recruitment, memos, manuals, etc. represents all members, cultures and languages within your community. ● Along with Teacher or Administrator of the Year what about your First Year Teacher, Mentor Teacher, Bus Drivers, Paras, Dietary, Custodial etc.
Warm, friendly interactions *EVERY DAY* with *EVERY Adult/STAFF Member*	● How are people greeted when the walk in the door?
Inclusive invitations to participate for all staff member groups - regardless of role	● How are all staff / families / visitors included?
Implementation and Environmental Accommodations - ensure that every **staff member** has what they need to be able to implement their role with success	● How do all staff access information they need to successfully contribute?
Unveil the Invisible - Two-way communication to learn the implicit biases, misconceptions, and perceptions that influence whether everyone feels like they belong and are respected	● How do all staff access survey results, decision making communications, celebrations etc.? Clear is kind!
My notes:	
Search keywords in text messages: (negative then positive counts)	How many of your interactions are negative vs. those that build friendship, connection, belonging? How can I be more intentional about using key words?
My notes:	

STUDENT BELONGING

30 Sec Belonging	
Favorite Things / 5 Senses	Identify a theme or topic (e.g. Sporting events) Go back to back with a partner. Call out one of the 5 senses and then count 3-2-1 and both partners turn to face each other. At the same time state your response. Example: Favorite Things at Sporting Event Smell: Hot Dogs Sounds: Singing National Anthem Touch: Hot sun on your face …. Other Ideas: When I think of Home, On a trip, etc.
My notes:	
Threshold Greeting	A threshold greeting in schools involves teachers welcoming students at the doorway of their classroom as they enter. This practice is used to build positive relationships, set expectations for the day, and foster social-emotional learning.
My notes:	
Share your Screen Saver	When walking alongside someone, ask to see their screen saver. Inquire - why is this picture important to you?
My notes:	
Adult Connections: Create a wall of student portraits -	Have adults write positives about student in pages below their portraits. Who has no comments? Assign "popular" adult teachers/staff that are outgoing and friendly to build relationships or find adults that may have common interests.
My notes:	
Perspective Getting [#] - Listening well (antidote to FAE)	The Perspective-Getting Strategy by Geoffrey L. Cohen is a psychological approach designed to reduce conflict and increase understanding between individuals or groups with differing viewpoints. It focuses on actively trying to understand how another person sees the world—not just sympathizing or guessing, but truly trying to grasp their perspective through direct engagement. 6. **Ask, Don't Assume**: Instead of projecting your own ideas or assumptions onto someone else's experience, the strategy emphasizes **asking open-ended questions** to better understand how they see things.

7. **Listen Actively and Nonjudgmentally**:
   The goal is not to debate or correct, but to genuinely listen. You're not trying to change the other person's mind but to understand it.

8. **Clarify and Reflect**:
   As the person speaks, the listener should **paraphrase or summarize** what was said to ensure understanding. This helps the speaker feel heard and encourages more open conversation.

9. **Build Connection Through Understanding**:
   By demonstrating true curiosity and empathy, the listener often builds trust and reduces defensiveness—even when there is deep disagreement.

10. **Emphasis on Interpersonal Contact**:
    Cohen's research shows that even brief, respectful interactions that focus on **understanding the other's perspective** can significantly **reduce polarization**, especially in political or ideological conflicts.

My notes:

Whole Group / Classroom

| **Classroom Jigsaw[#]** | A cooperative learning strategy where students work in small, diverse groups, with each member specializing in a different aspect of a topic and then sharing their expertise with the rest of the group. This approach aims to promote intergroup cooperation, enhance learning, and foster empathy.

How it works:

1. Divide and assign:
Students are divided into groups (jigsaw groups), and each member is assigned a specific section or topic of a larger lesson.
2. Expert groups:
Students from different jigsaw groups who have the same assigned topic form temporary "expert groups" to discuss and master their assigned material.
3. Share and learn:
Students return to their original jigsaw groups and share their expertise with their group members, helping everyone understand the entire topic.
4. Collaborate:
The group works together to complete a final |

	task or assignment, showcasing their collective understanding.
My notes:	
Values Affirmations[#]	A technique where individuals reflect on their core values to enhance their sense of self-worth and reduce negative emotions or feelings of inadequacy. It involves identifying important values and writing about how they are manifested in daily life, which can lead to improved engagement, attainment, and exam performance, particularly for students from underrepresented groups. Article: <u>The Power of Affirming One's Values: Classrooms as Supportive Spaces</u> <u>Sample Activity</u>
My notes:	
Belonging Uncertainty Testimonials[#]	Belonging uncertainty refers to the feeling of not fully fitting in or connecting with a group, often leading to self-doubt and isolation. These feelings can be particularly pronounced during transitions, like starting college, and can impact mental health and academic performance. Testimonials from students struggling with belonging uncertainty often highlight the initial difficulty of feeling out of place, even though they are not alone in experiencing these doubts. **Testimonial Examples and Themes:** **Initial struggles:** Students often describe the initial difficulty of fitting in, feeling isolated, and questioning their ability to succeed in a new environment. **Overcoming the uncertainty:** Many testimonials highlight the importance of reaching out, seeking help, and connecting with others to address these feelings. **Finding a niche:** Students may describe how exploring their interests, joining clubs, and engaging in campus life helped them find a sense of belonging and overcome their uncertainty. **The importance of support:** Mentorship, supportive faculty, and peer connections are often cited as crucial factors in helping students feel like they belong. **Normalization of the experience:**

	Many testimonials emphasize that it's normal to feel uncertain about belonging, especially when transitioning to a new environment. **Long-term impact:** Students may describe how building a sense of belonging improved their academic performance, social interactions, and overall well-being.
My notes:	
Situation Crafting[#]	Situation-Crafting is the science and art of creating transformative experiences. According to Cohen, there are 5 vital resources for doing this: 1. **Time:** Consider when people are vulnerable (e.g. new kid in school, etc.) Timing can be a powerful antidote to self-doubt. 2. **Participatory Processes:** Democratic leadership style. People have to be a part of the process. 3. **Reference Groups:** Having groups of people with whom we can identify and refer that are new/different.**Might be the most single most important driver of change.* 4. **Self-Affirmations:** Situational opportunities we create for people to express who they are and to be valued for it; credible and meaningful. 5. **New roles:** The word "identity" derives from the word "sameness" or "oneness", and it is when a person and a role become one that the role has become an identity. (Cohen, 2022, pp. 18-21)
My notes:	
Wise Criticism[#]	Wise criticism involves framing feedback in terms of standards, expectations, and confidence in the individual's ability to succeed. It emphasizes that feedback is given with high expectations and belief in the recipient's ability to reach those expectations. **Focus on:** ● High Standards ● Confidence ● Growth **Key Principles:** ● Focus on Behavior, Not person ● Specific and Actionable ● Positive Tone ● Belief in Potential

Examples:
- **Instead of:** "Your presentation was terrible. You didn't even understand the topic."
- **Say:** "Your presentation was very well-structured, but we could improve it by incorporating more visuals to better illustrate your points. I know you can make it even stronger with a few tweaks."
- **Instead of:** "You're always late for meetings. It's disrespectful."
- **Say:** "I appreciate your contributions to the team, but I've noticed you've been late to the last few meetings. Could we discuss this so you can better meet the time expectations?"
- **Instead of:** "This essay is a mess. You clearly didn't put any effort into it."
- **Say:** "This essay shows a lot of promise. I know you can improve it by adding more detail and examples to support your arguments. I'm confident you can bring it to a higher level."

My notes:

Group Community Builder(s):

- "Stand if you've ever…": A physical movement to show connection without speaking.

- "Raise your hand if…": Quick and easy way to visualize shared experiences.

- Pair & Share: After a question, let people turn to a partner to reflect briefly.

Group Share: Invite 2–3 people to share a story sparked by a question.

◆ **EASY** (Fun & Low-Stakes)

Good for warming people up and making them comfortable.

- Who here has ever laughed so hard they cried?

- Who has ever stayed up way too late binge-watching something?

- Who remembers a favorite snack from childhood?

- Who danced in their room when no one was watching?

◆ **MEDIUM** (Personal but Common)

These begin to surface relatable human experiences.

- Who has ever felt like they didn't quite fit in?

- Who's had a moment where they felt really proud of themselves?

- Who's ever had a mentor, teacher, or coach who changed their life?

- Who's ever been nervous to try something new?

- Who's ever had their heart broken in any way?

	◆ **DEEP** (Vulnerable & Humanizing) *For groups with a stronger foundation of trust or intentional space for deeper connection.* ● Who here has ever felt invisible in a room? ● Who's ever had to forgive someone or been forgiven? ● Who's ever been scared of failing but tried anyway? ● Who's ever felt like giving up—but didn't? ● Who's ever found comfort in a stranger's kindness?
My notes:	

Schoolwide

Micro-norming	Tiny behaviors that establish powerful norms: values in both words and deeds. Micro-norming in the classroom refers to the micro-level mechanisms and processes that explain how social norms at the classroom level influence individual student behavior and development. It focuses on how norms related to topics like popularity, bullying, and aggression affect decisions about whether to defend others or not.
	Microfoundations:
	This term refers to the specific mechanisms and processes at the individual level that explain how social norms influence behavior. For example, someone might choose to intervene in a bullying situation based on the perceived social costs of not doing so, even if they don't feel personally threatened.
	Classroom Norms:
	These are the unwritten social rules and expectations that govern behavior within a specific classroom setting. Examples include norms about raising hands before speaking, being respectful, or respecting each other's opinions.
	Impact on Behavior:
	Micro-norming explores how these norms influence individual decisions and actions. For instance, if students believe that intervening in a bullying situation could negatively affect their social standing or popularity, they might be less likely to get involved.
	Examples:
	● **Norm Conformity:** Students may choose to follow the dominant norms of the classroom, even if they personally disagree, to avoid social rejection.
	● **Pluralistic Ignorance:** Students might mistakenly believe that others in the classroom share the same views and opinions as they do, even if they don't, leading to a misunderstanding of the actual norms in place.
	● **Power Balance:** Students may be more likely to defend others in situations where they feel empowered by the teacher or other influential students in the classroom.
My notes:	

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP)	Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP), developed by Gloria Ladson-Billings, is a teaching framework that emphasizes the importance of connecting students' cultural backgrounds and experiences with the curriculum to enhance their learning and achievement. It aims to empower students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by utilizing cultural and historical referents. CRP recognizes that students' diverse cultural backgrounds can be a strength in the learning process and should be leveraged to create a supportive and inclusive learning environment. **Connecting culture to learning:** CRP acknowledges that students' cultural identities and experiences shape their learning and how they make sense of the world. **Empowerment and agency:** CRP aims to empower students to become critical thinkers and active participants in their education, challenging them to consider their own identities and perspectives. **Equity and social justice:** CRP is grounded in the principles of social justice, seeking to address inequities and empower marginalized groups. **Focus on academic success and cultural competence:** CRP encourages students to achieve academically, develop cultural competence, and critically analyze social inequalities. **Reflective practice:** CRP requires teachers to reflect on their own biases and assumptions and to adapt their teaching practices to meet the diverse needs of their students. **Principles of CRP:** **Identity Development:** Teachers are encouraged to understand their own identities and biases and to create a safe and affirming space for students to explore their identities. **Equity and Excellence:** CRP aims to provide all students with access to high-quality education and to create a learning environment where all students can thrive. **Developmental Appropriateness:** CRP emphasizes the importance of tailoring instruction to the developmental needs of students, considering their individual learning styles and experiences. **Teaching the Whole Child:** CRP recognizes that students are not just minds but also emotions, bodies,

	and social beings, and that their well-being is essential for their learning.
	Student-Teacher Relationships:
	CRP emphasizes the importance of building strong, positive relationships between teachers and students, creating a sense of trust and connection in the classroom.

My notes:

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Murthy, V. H., (2020). *Together* (Vol. 617). New York, NY, USA: Harper Collins Publishers.

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Waldinger, R., & Schulz, M. (2023). *The good life: lessons from the world's longest scientific study of happiness*. Simon and Schuster.

Yaeger, D. (2024). *10 to 25: The science of motivating young people: A groundbreaking approach to leading the next generation—and making your own life easier.* Random House.

Online Resources

Staff

- [What Do People Need Most from Leaders?](#) > Gallup
- [What is the Cost of Teacher Turnover](#) > Learning Policy Institute
- [State of Teacher Workforce 2024](#) > [Interactive Map](#) > Learning Policy institute
- [Key Factors About Public School Teachers in the US](#) > Pew Research
- [Mo Educator Vacancy Report 2024](#)
- [Strengthening teacher recruitment and retention in Missouri.](#) Blue Ribbon Commission or BRC
- [2021–22 Teacher Follow-Up Survey and the 2020–21 Civil Rights Data Collection](#) >
- National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) TABLE with statistics
- [Workplace Mental Health & Well-Being](#) > US Surgeon General > Dr. Vivek Murthy
- [Happiness Advantage](#) > Shawn Achor Ted Talk
    - **3 Gratitudes** ([Emmons & McCullough, 2003](#))
    - **Journaling** ([Slatcher & Pennebaker, 2006](#))
    - **Exercise** ([Babyak et, al., 2000](#))
    - **Meditation** (Dweck, 2007)
    - **Random Acts of Kindness** ([Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005](#))
- **Levels of Participation**
    - Shier, H. (2001). **Pathways to participation: Openings, opportunities and obligations**. *Children & Society*, 15, 107–117.
        - https://organizingengagement.org/models/pathways-to-participation/
    - Shier, H. (2006). **Pathways to Participation revisited: Nicaragua perspective**. *Middle Schooling Review*, 2, 14–19.
    - Shier, H. (2010). **Pathways to Participation revisited: Learning from Nicaragua's child coffee workers**. In N. Thomas & B. Percy-Smith (Eds.).
- [Fearless Organization Scan](#) Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace for Learning, Innovation, and Growth
- [Be Mindwise: Perspective Taking Vs Perspective Getting](#) > Behavioral [Scientist.org](#)
- [What Google Learned from Its Quest to Build the Perfect Team](#) > New York Times
- [A Crisis of Belonging](#) > Harvard Ed PodCast w/ Geoffrey Cohen
- [Creating a Sense of Belonging in a Divided America](#) > Time Magazine
- [Belonging at Work](#)> Harvard Business Review
- [Our Epidemic of Loneliness & Isolation](#) > U.S. Surgeon General
    - Advisory [PDF](#) [Summary: Key Take-Aways](#)
    - [U.S. Surgeon General's 5 for 5 Commitment](#)

Student

- **YOUTH RISK BEHAVIOR Surveillance SURVEY** (YRBSS)
- On Belonging: An introduction to Belonging & Othering in Europe > Othering & Belonging Institute
- To Motivate Teens, Ask Them "Who's Your Future Self?" > EduTopia
- The Science Of Student Motivation > EduTopia
- The "First Responder" Helping Students Navigate Roadblocks > EduTopia