

# THRIVING TOGETHER

BUILDING CONNECTIONS FOR TEACHER  
WELL-BEING AND STUDENT SUCCESS

## The Science of Belonging: Creating Spaces where all Staff can Thrive

MO SW-PBS Summer Institute 2025

# THRIVING TOGETHER

BUILDING CONNECTIONS FOR TEACHER  
WELL-BEING AND STUDENT SUCCESS

## Introductions

Jamie Grieshaber, MO SW-PBS Statewide Coach and District Facilitator

Nanci Johnson, MO SW-PBS State Director

Michelle Kruse, School Safety Specialist & Academy Program Coordinator, MSBA Center for Education Safety

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## Visual Prompt for Connecting Activities



Who else is in the room...

That's Me!

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## Outcomes

1. Understand the importance of cultivating environments that foster a sense of belonging for all adults.
2. Learn how to facilitate a welcoming and safe work environment for all staff.
3. Apply the concepts of belonging within and across your organization.

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## Outcome 1

**Understand the importance of  
cultivating environments that foster a  
sense of belonging for all adults.**



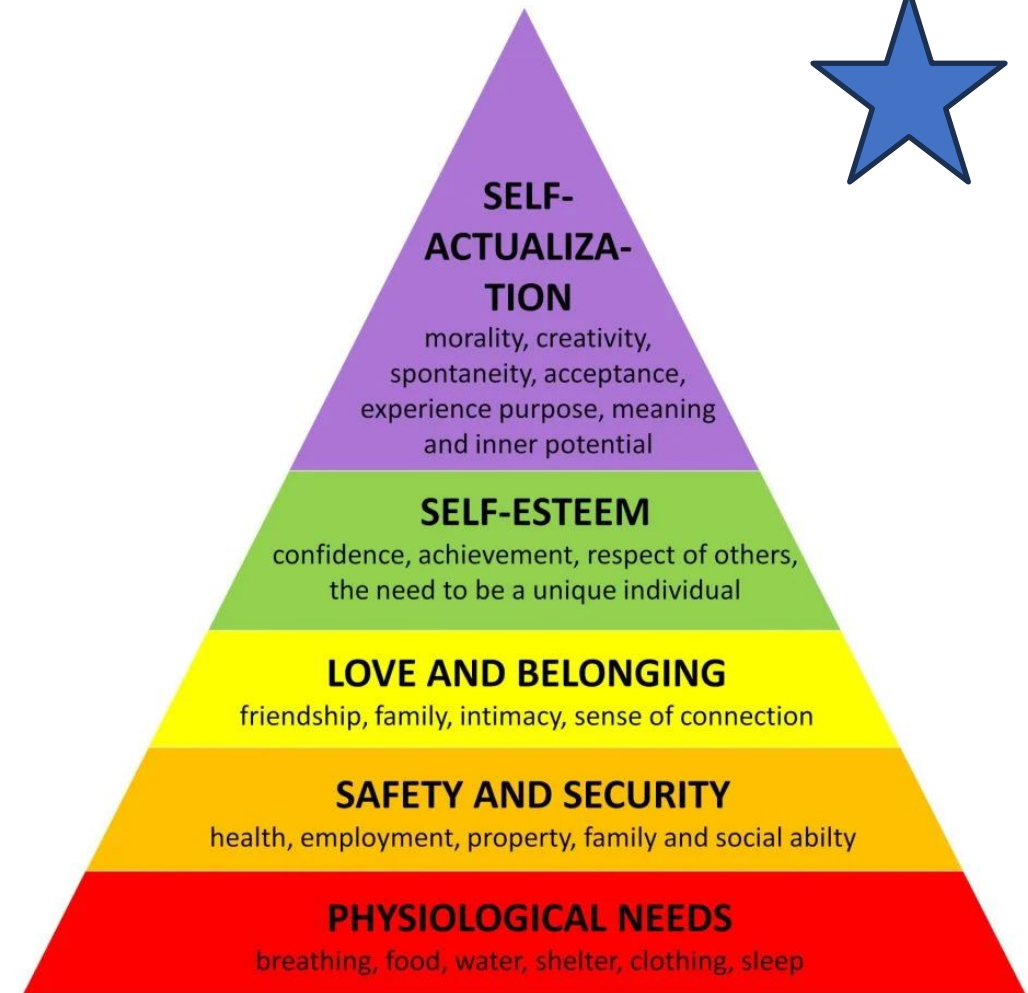
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## Why focus on Belonging

## Why are YOU here today?

## What do YOU hope to learn?



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In a word,  
what do you  
feel when  
you know  
you belong?

When I Belong...



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word cloud here...



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*“We are wired for connection.”*

Murthy, 2020

*“positive relationships are essential to human well-being.”*

*“...a rich life - **a good life** - is forged from precisely the things that make it hard.”*

Waldinger & Schulz, 2023

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## 3 Psychological Needs of Humans

***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***.*



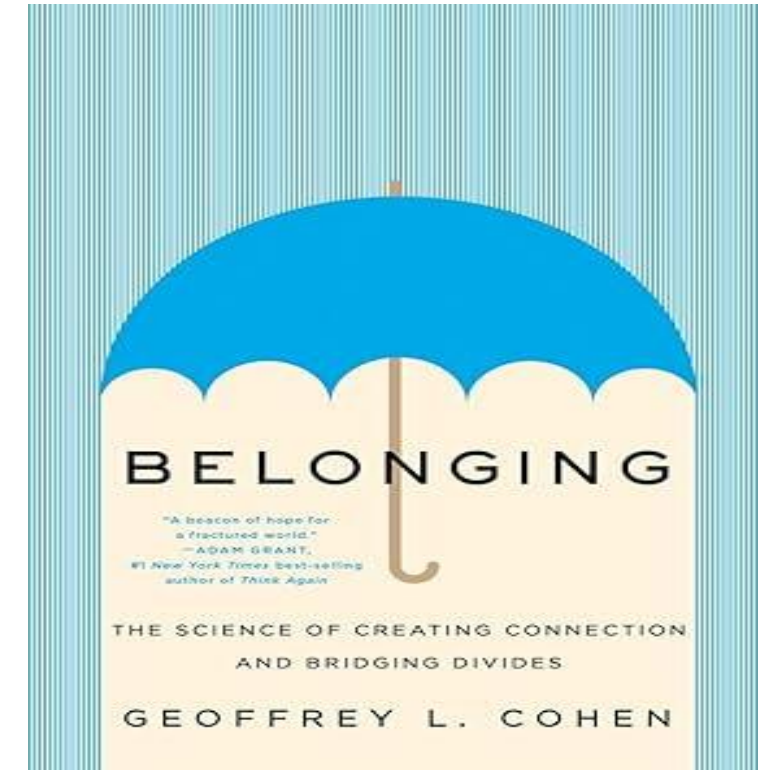
~ Ryan & Deci, 2000

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Defining and understanding ***Belonging***...and a few other terms...

- Belonging & *Belonging Uncertainty*
- Stereotype Threat & FAE
- Loneliness
- Isolation
- Solitude
- Situation Crafting
- Wise Interventions
- Wise Criticism / Feedback



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## 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)





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## 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)



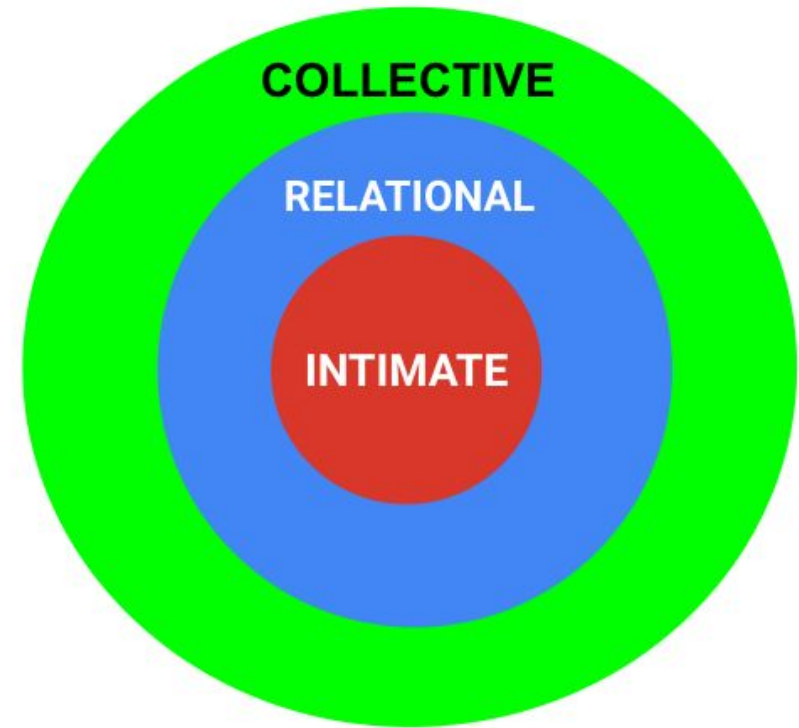


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## Loneliness

“...is the *subjective feeling* that you’re lacking the social connections you need.”



Murthy, 2020

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## Isolation

“...the objective physical state of being alone and out of touch with other people.”

Murthy, 2020



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## 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





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## 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

(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)

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## Belonging Continuum



**Stereotype Threat (internal state)**

**Fundamental Attribution Error (external threat)**



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## Outcome 2

Learn how to foster a welcoming  
and safe work environment  
for all staff.

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## Know Your Implementation Inputs

- **PBIS Apps or MO SW-PBS Surveys > Fidelity**
  - **MO SW-PBS Building Walkthrough**
  - **Self-Assessment Survey (SAS) > ALL Staff**
  - **Tiered Fidelity Inventory (TFI) > Building Leadership Team (BLT)**
  - **District Systems Fidelity Inventory (DSFI) > District Leadership Team (DLT)**
- **School Climate & Feedback Surveys > Perceptions**
  - **MO DESE MSIP-6**
    - 3 required questions:
      - The school system ensures student voices are heard & respected.
      - The school system provides school culture & climate data and reports periodically to all stakeholders.
      - Educator teams address positive classroom learning environments.
  - **PBIS APPs > School Climate Survey**
    - Staff / Parent-Family / Older Students / Elementary Students
- **DLT or BLT created staff surveys**

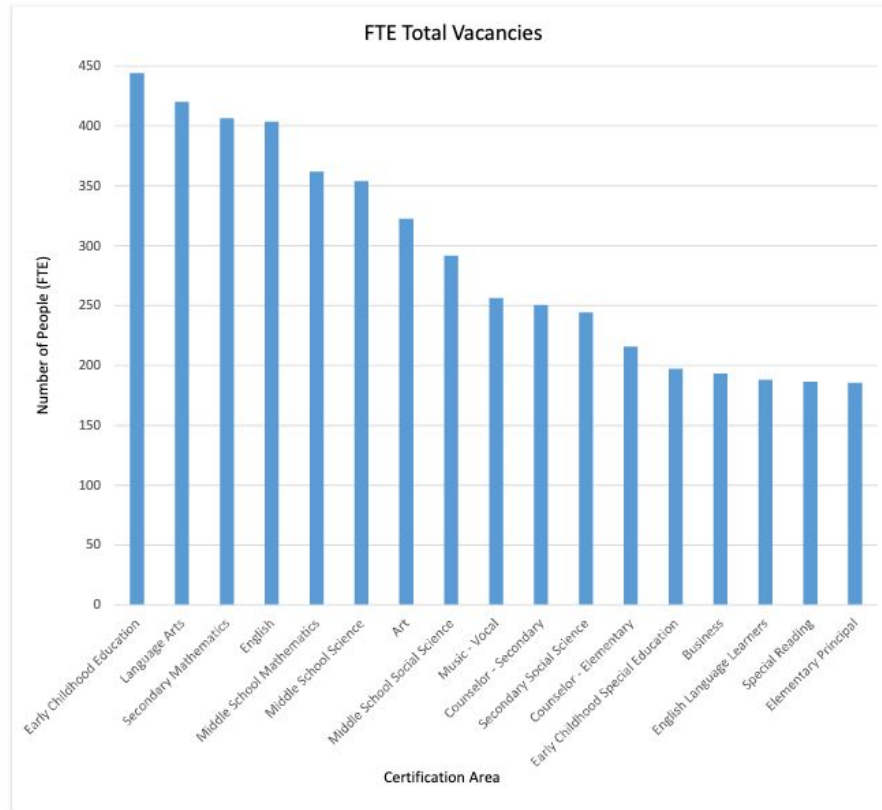
## Know Your Outcomes

- **Student Outcomes**
  - Attendance
  - Office Discipline Referrals (ODRs)
  - OSS / ISS
  - Academic Progress/Achievement
    - Formative / Summative
  - Graduation Rates
  - Student subgroups
- **Staff Outcomes**
  - **Staff Retention** > what are rates in Missouri?
    - [50 State Teacher Retention & Recruitment](#)
  - Staff Attendance
  - PBIS APPs
    - SAS & TFI
    - Feedback and Input Survey

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## Cost of Teacher Turnover



### 1. How many teachers left your school or district?

Enter a Number

Let Us Help You

Enter the number of teachers who left last year

Don't know? Use the tab above to let us help you calculate an estimate.

10

0

1000+

### 2. What's the cost of replacing a teacher?

Use the slider to estimate the cost of replacing a teacher in **YOUR** school or district. Costs include expenses and person hours related to processing a teacher's exit, as well as costs to recruit, hire, and train new teachers. [Read more.](#)

Enter the cost of replacing a teacher for your school or district

\$11,860

\$1,000

\$40,000

Don't know? Use one of our [district estimates](#):

☒

Small

(Under 10,000 students)

☐

Medium

(10,000-50,000 students)

☐

Large

(Over 50,000 students)

Estimated Cost of  
Turnover \*

**\$118,600**

Cutting turnover in half  
would save

**\$59,300**

\* Teacher turnover is costly, and not just in dollars. Studies show that student achievement suffers in schools with high turnover.

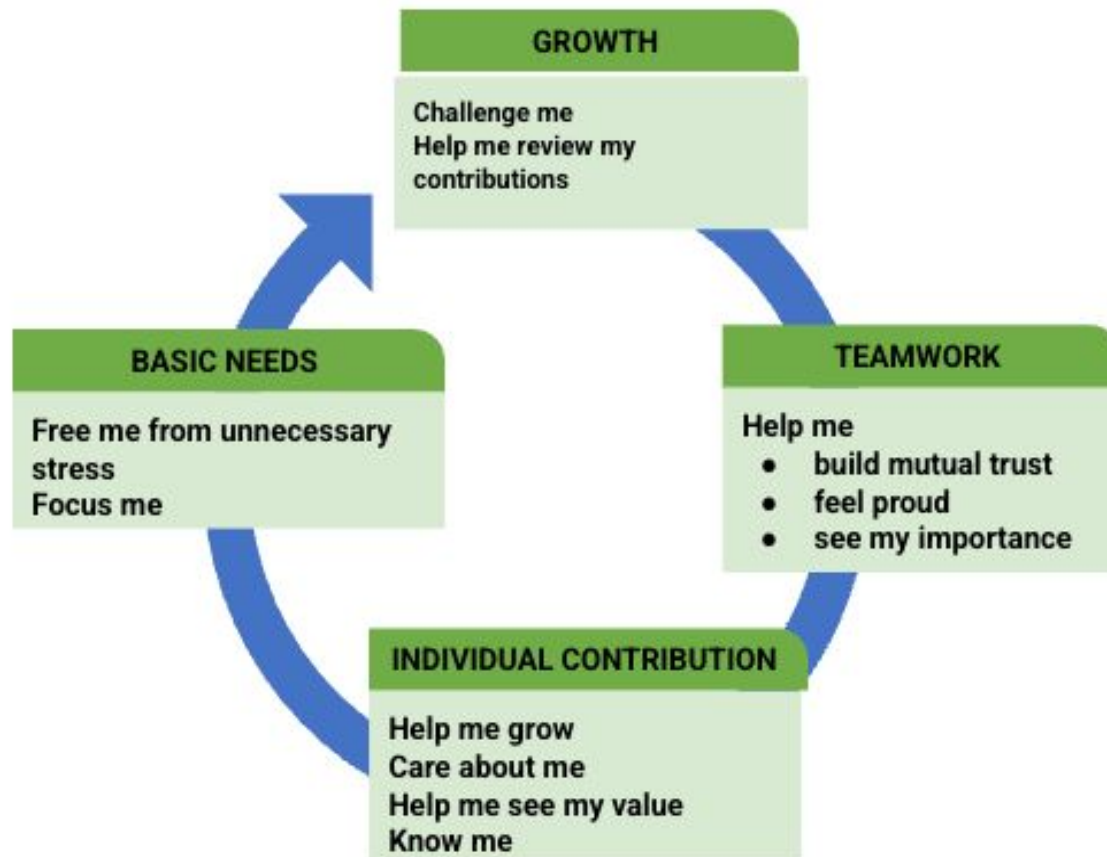
2024 MO DESE 3,414.7 vacancies in Elementary Education, 1,532.5 vacancies in Special Education, and 470.3 vacancies in Physical Education. 1,938 filled w/ inappropriately certified staff.



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## Gallup Employee Engagement Survey



00. How satisfied are you with your company as a place to work?
01. I know what is expected of me at work.
02. I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right.
03. At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.
04. In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work.
05. My supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person.
06. There is someone at work who encourages my development.
07. At work, my opinions seem to count.
08. The mission or purpose of my company makes me feel my job is important.
09. My associates or fellow employees are committed to doing quality work.
10. I have a best friend at work.
11. In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress.
12. This last year, I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow.

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## Happy Employees Perform Better



**Dr. Laurie Santos**

Yale professor. Scientist. Podcast host.

The strongest predictor of workplace well-being isn't salary or management style—it's our sense of belonging.

And here's why this matters: a sense of belonging tends to boost happiness at work. And a recent study from Oxford University found that companies with the happiest employees tend to make the most money. When we invest in workplace belonging, everyone wins.

DE NEVE, KAATS, AND WARD (2024)

### Three Key Factors Matter Most:

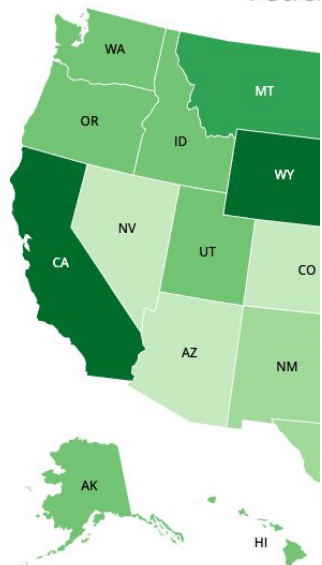
1. Feeling genuinely cared about at work
2. Believing that your contributions matter
3. Having at least one close workplace friend



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## Missouri Educator Data



Teach

Opportunities for professional  
advancement or promotion

6.4

54.2

39.5

Opportunities for professional  
development

8.5

47.0

44.5

Opportunities for learning from  
colleagues

14.1

41.4

44.5

Social relationships with colleagues

23.8

28.4

47.8

Recognition and support from  
administrators/managers

11.3

50.3

38.3

Safety of environment

8.9!

37.7

53.4

Influence over workplace policies and  
practices

6.7

53.0

40.3

Autonomy or control over own work

10.3

60.0

29.8

Professional prestige

9.9

59.4

30.7

Procedures for performance evaluation

8.9

37.1

54.0

All public school teacher leavers

Thriving  
Better in  
current  
position  
Not  
better or  
worse

19.0 38.1 42.9  
16.7 18.6 64.7

6.4 54.2 39.5

8.5 47.0 44.5

14.1 41.4 44.5  
23.8 28.4 47.8

11.3 50.3 38.3  
8.9! 37.7 53.4

6.7 53.0 40.3  
10.3 60.0 29.8  
9.9 59.4 30.7

8.9 37.1 54.0  
14.8 58.0 27.2  
13.9 65.1 21.1

7.6 44.0 48.4  
7.2! 50.0 42.8  
22.9 20.7 56.4

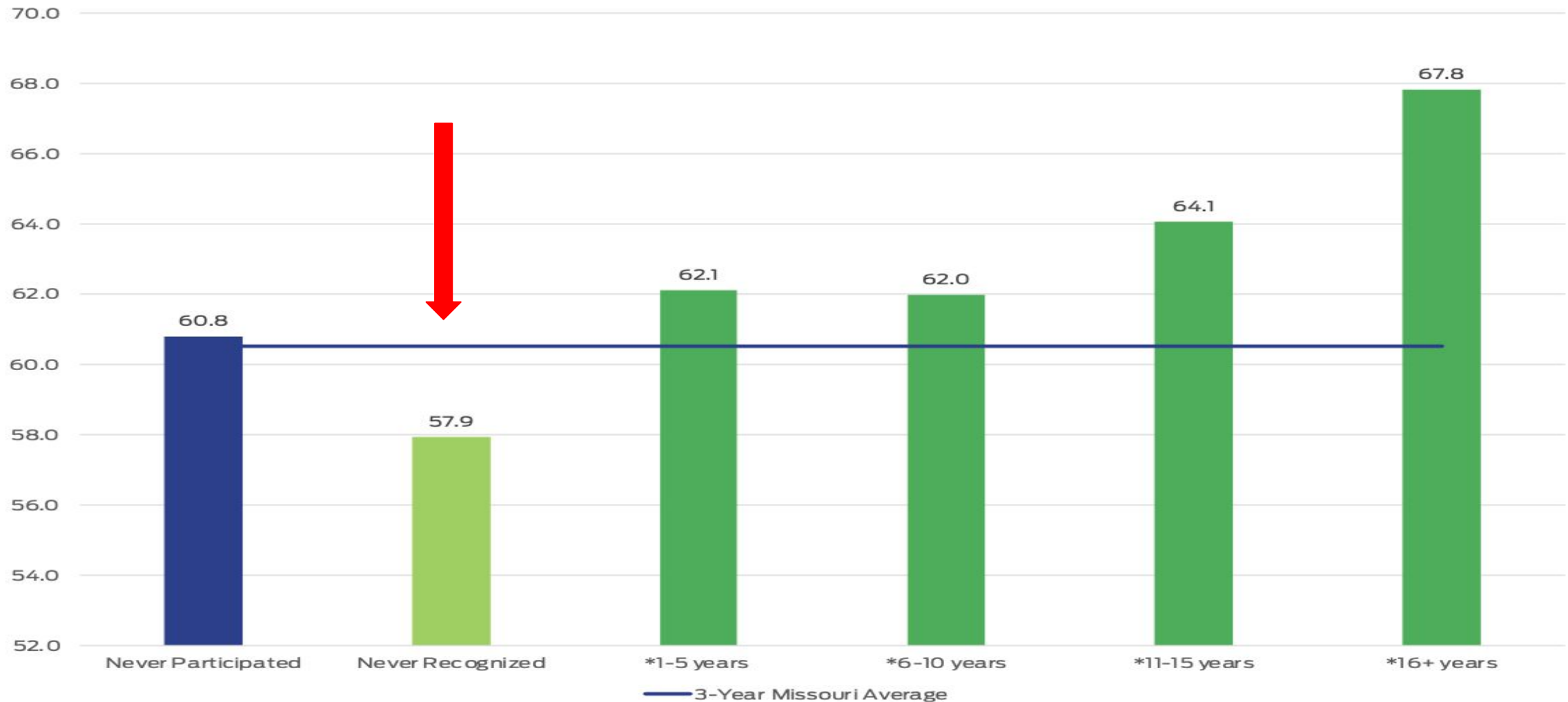
7.9 45.2 46.9  
15.3 46.7 38.0

20.2 31.3 48.4

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## 2024 3-Year Staff Retention by Years of Recognition



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## Situation Crafting

*“Shaping a situation,  
even in seemingly  
minor ways, in order  
to foster belonging.”*

(Cohen, 2022)





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## Wise Interventions

### Key Features:

1. **Message Framing** - challenge *negative* perceptions
2. **Promote Belonging** - collective growth process (we all fail)
3. **Empowerment** - sense of agency and control

“Wise interventions 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)

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## BUILDING CONNECTIONS FOR TEACHER WELL-BEING AND STUDENT SUCCESS

### 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

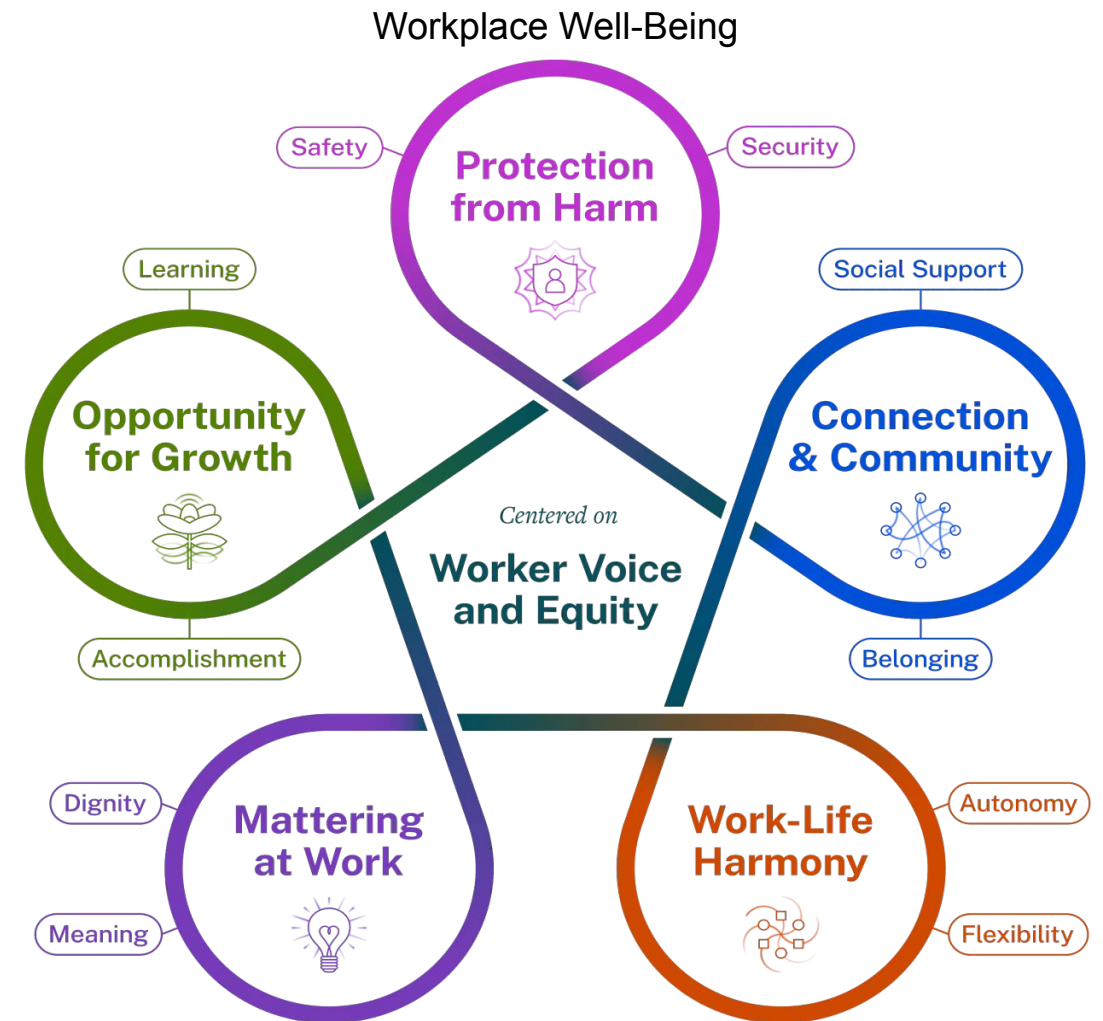
- Provide more autonomy over how work is done
- Make schedules as flexible and predictable as possible
- Increase access to paid leave
- Respect boundaries between work and non-work time

### 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



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

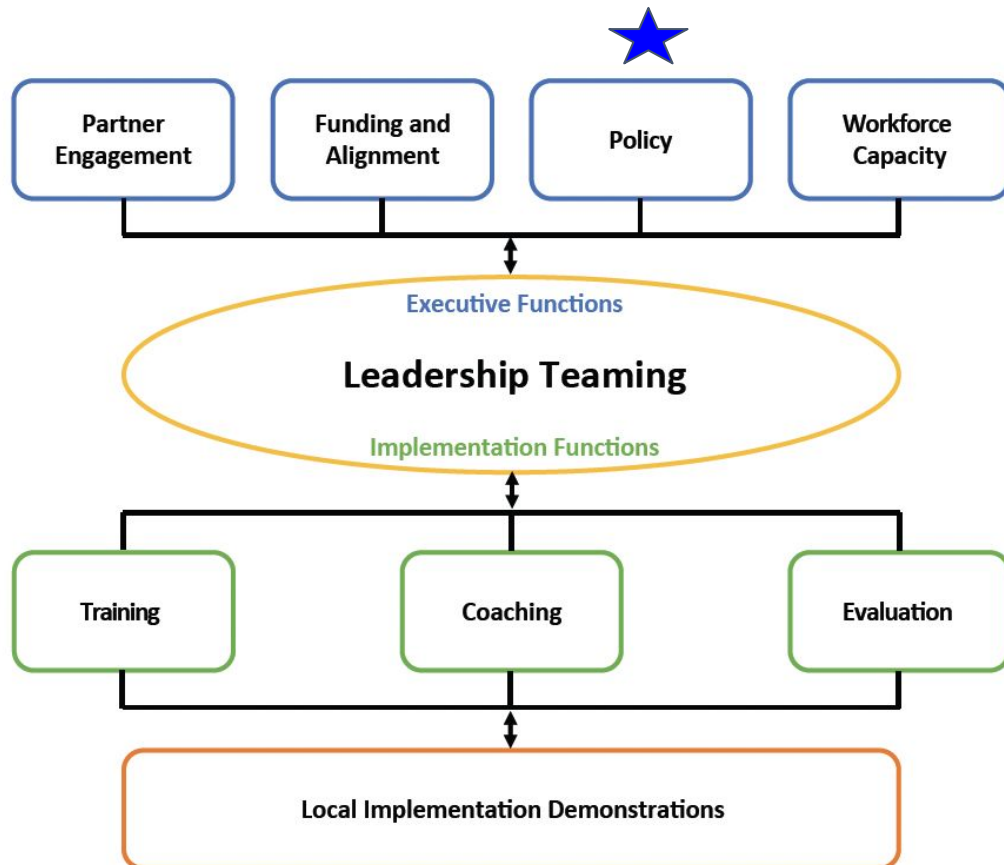


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## Situation Crafting for **Adult** Belonging - Districtwide

*Connection & Community* - *Mattering at Work* - *Opportunity for Growth*



### Policy

4.1 Mission & Vision

4.2 Instructional Approach

4.3 Discipline Guidelines

### Policy >

4.1 Mission & Vision  
4.2 Instructional Approach  
4.3 Discipline Guidelines

### Workforce Capacity >

5.2 Job Descriptions

Implementation Feedback Loop  
Differentiated Supports

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*A disconnected and / or dysregulated adult is less likely to be of support to a disconnected and / or dysregulated student (or colleague).*

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## Outcome 3

Apply the concepts of belonging within  
and across your organization.

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## Situation Crafting for Belonging

**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.

**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)



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## Culture vs. Climate

“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)*

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## Explicit Invitations - *Culture*

1. Values Affirmation Activities
2. Mentoring Mindset
3. “Team” Membership & PARTICIPATION
4. Psychological Safety

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## **Explicit Invitations - Values Affirmation Activities**

- **Mission-Vision-Values-Goals (MVVG)**
  - aligning the organizational Goals / CSIP to each individual's WHY
- **Essential Components of SW-PBS**
  - engaging all voice in development & implementation
- **Values Messaging**
  - Clarity, Frequency, and Timing

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## Celebrate the Good: Connect to Vision, Mission, Values



### Our Vision:

"Ensure each student thrives in a future -focused learning environment as they build their skills becoming responsible citizens."

### Our Mission:

"Each student and every staff member will demonstrate high achievement, character and collaboration in a diverse community."

### Our Core Values:

- High Expectations for Student Success
- Safe and Respectful Schools
- Lifetime Community and Family Centric Relationships
- High Qualified, Diverse Staff
- Diversity in Our Schools and Community



*Hive Society is dedicated to enhancing our climate and culture by recognizing the caring individuals committed to fostering belonging and connection in the Center family.*

*Please help us acknowledge the incredible gifts our colleagues bring to Center School District. We'll choose one district-wide nominee each month to honor in a BIG way.*

*Check out past winners [here](#).*

**SCHOOL  
CENTER  
DISTRICT**





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This Certifies that

**AMARI KENDI**

is the Center School District Hive Society Employee of the Month for May, 2025.

Ms. Kendi exemplifies our core value of "Diversity in Our Schools and Community." Ms. Kendi continuously finds new ways to celebrate the things that make us all unique. She is intentional about including diverse perspectives and ideas in decision-making and makes all of us (students and colleagues alike) feel included, respected, and like we belong.

Ms. Kendi has been the secondary ELL teacher at CMS and CHS the past two years and recently became the full time CMS ELL Teacher when she worked with Dr. Casey, Dr. McCarthy, and Mr. Stern to open a Newcomer Center which provides a self-contained learning space for multilingual students who are new to the United States. There are currently 17 students in the program who are making incredible gains in their English proficiency. Amari's ability to honor students from a wide-range of countries and create a safe space for learning is top notch. Amari definitely celebrates diversity and helps our newcomers feel at home and like they belong at CMS from day one.

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## **Explicit Invitations - *Mentoring Mindset* \*** **High Standards & High Supports**

- **Transparency - “*Wise Criticism*”**
  - Belief in Capacity
  - Support for Growth
  - Timely & Repeated statements on organizational mentoring mindset
- **Questioning - Joint Problem Solving**
  - The Coaching Habit & The Advice Trap
  - Questioning with “**Up Take**” (Math - “focusing questions”)
- **Stress Response** - “stress can be enhancing” beliefs
- **Purpose Getting** - connecting the task to a beyond-self purpose
- **Belonging** - C-A-R (Belonging) can lead to Status & Respect

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## “Happiness Advantage”



[Shawn Achor, 2011 - 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](#))

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## Explicit Invitations - Teaming

- Does **EVERYONE FEEL** they are part of **THE ORGANIZATIONAL TEAM**?
  - Onboarding rituals
  - Branding opportunities
  - Celebrations
- Is **EVERYONE** Part of “A Team”? – meeting to **build community** and **engage** in collaborative solution planning.
- Is **EVERYONE** Part of an **EFFECTIVE** Team? **Teaming Processes and Norms** - how do you proactively set norms of engagement?



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## Levels of Participation - Continuum of Participation

<b>Staff share power and responsibility for decision making.</b>	Are you ready to share some of your adult power with staff? Is there a procedure that enables staff and administration to share power and responsibility for decisions?
<b>Staff are involved in the decision-making process.</b>	Are you ready to let staff join in your decision-making process? Is there a procedure that enables staff to join in the decision-making process?
<b>Staff views are taken into account.</b>	Are you ready to take staff views into account? Does your decision-making process enable you to take staffs' views into account?
<b>Staff are supported in expressing their voice.</b>	Are you ready to support staff in expressing their views? Do you have a range of ideas or activities to help staff express their views?
<b>Staff are listened to.</b>	Are you ready to listen to staff? Do you work in a way that enables you to listen to staff?

Adapted from [Organizing Engagement](#) Shrier, 2001

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## Teaming Options...are endless

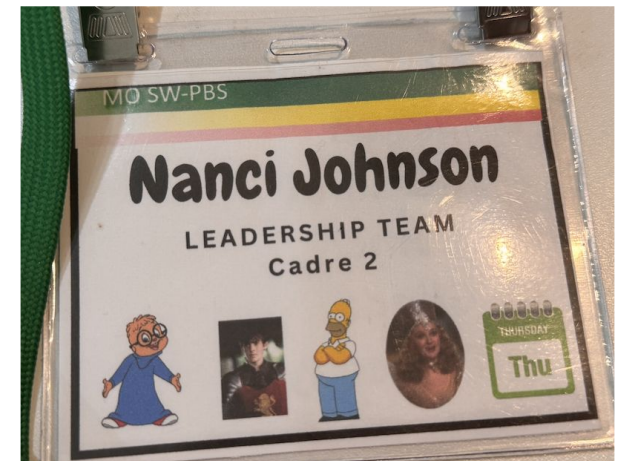
- Districtwide Teams
- Building-Wide Teams
- Grade or Department Level
- Vertical Teams
- Committees (e.g., Culture & Climate)



- Student Families/Dens/Groups
  - **Gerald Elementary & Excelsior Springs Middle Schools**
- Student Interest Clubs
- PTO and Family Groups

### Effective Teaming Procedures & Processes

- Norms / Working Agreements
- Agendas
- Anchored in Mission / Vision / Values / Goals



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## Explicit Invitations - Psychological Safety

“If you are missing psychological safety,  
you’re missing the potential of nearly everyone on your team.”

### The Fearless Organization Scan:

- **Attitude to Risk & Failure** > normalizing being new, learning and failure
- **Open Conversation** > vulnerability to take risks
- **Inclusion & Diversity** > does EVERYONE truly BELONG?
- **Willingness to Help** > proactive offers of assistance, freely sharing time, talents, treasures...

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## Perspective Getting vs Perspective Taking

The weakness of **perspective taking** is obvious: it relies on your ability to imagine, or take, the other person's perspective accurately.

If we want to understand what's on the mind of another, the best our mortal senses can do may be to ***rely on our ears more than our inferences.***





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## Perspective Getting

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. (Questioning with "Up Take")
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.

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## Psychological Safety w/in Perspective Getting

### Transparent Processes:

- What are you capturing?
- How are you capturing it?
- How are you sharing results?
- How are you using results for **Solution Planning?**

### Examples:

- Social Validity Surveys / Interviews
- Post-Meeting Feedback
- Circle Up - Sharing Out
- 360<sup>0</sup> Feedback & Communication



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## Implicit Invitations - *Climate* “*Magical Moments*”

- **Cultural Representation** - all communication for all roles including recruitment materials, memos, manuals, etc. represents all cultures and languages within your community
- **Warm, friendly interactions** *EVERY DAY* with *EVERY Adult/STAFF Member*
- **Inclusive invitations to participate for all staff member groups** - regardless of role
- **Implementation and Environmental Accommodations** - ensure that every **staff member** has what they need to be able to implement their role with success
- **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

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***“Belonging is less like a keystone belief and more like a perception that’s continually being recreated anew in every situation.”***

(Cohen, 2022)





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Consider how you are promoting  
BELONGING & **C-A-R** for ALL Staff?

Supporting - *Competence*

- Just-in-Time, Just-As-Needed

Balancing - *Autonomy*

- Managers Set Direction / Teams Set Means for Completion

Facilitating - *Relatedness*

- Community for all is at the core of everything we do



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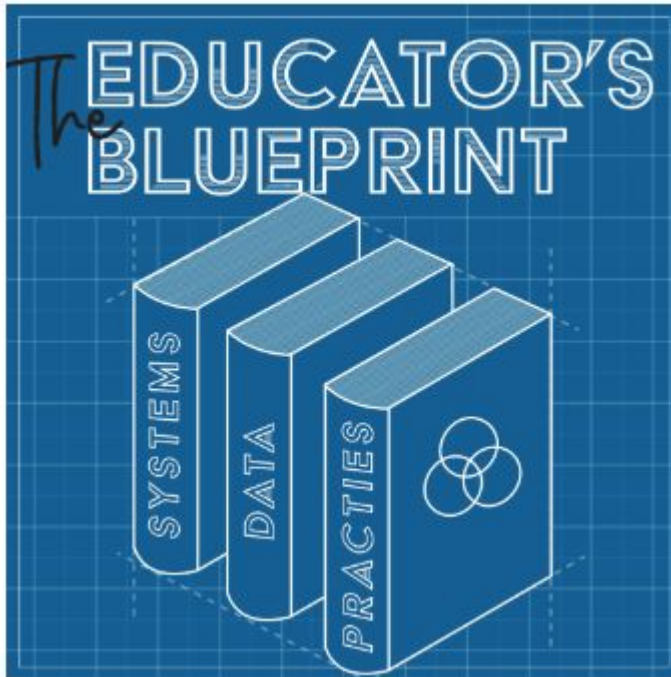
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## The Educator's Blueprint Podcast



### With your Hosts:

Lisa Powers, Ph.D., Trisha Guffey, Ed.D., and Jamie Grieshaber

Join us as we engage in meaningful conversations on topics currently impacting our school systems, behavior, and instructional practices. From the classroom to the boardroom, we welcome you to unpack, reflect, and learn with us.

### Season 4:

Episode 75: Belonging and the Science of Connection with Jamie Grieshaber

Episode 76: Dr. Nikole Hollins-Sims on Equity and Belonging

Episode 77: Responding to Crisis: What do in Recovery: A conversation with Dr. Steve Goodman and Dr. Jen Freeman

Episode 78: School Safety and Connection with Michelle Kruse

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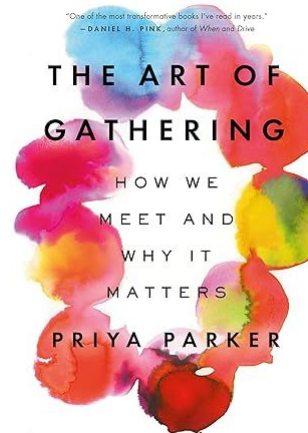
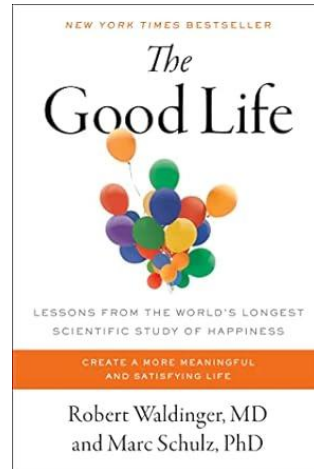
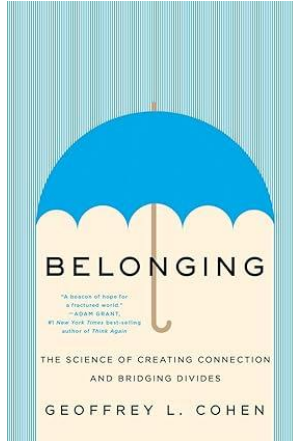
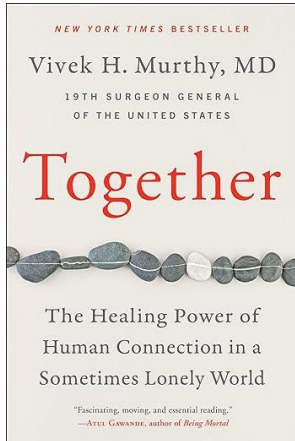




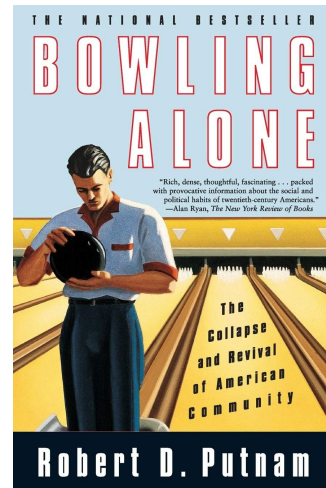
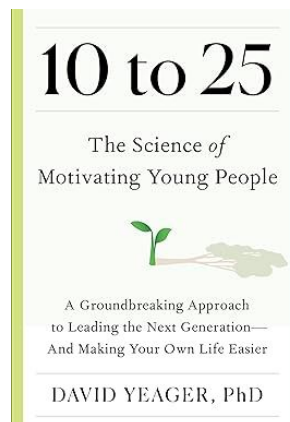
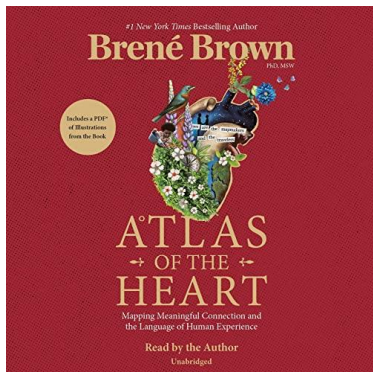
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## Resources Used



- [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](#)



## U.S. Surgeon General (3/6)

- [National Strategy to Advance Social Connection](#)
- [Protecting Youth Mental Health](#)
- [Workplace Well Being](#)



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## Contact Information

Jamie Grieshaber- [grieshaberj@missouri.edu](mailto:grieshaberj@missouri.edu)

Nanci Johnson - [johnsonnw@missouri.edu](mailto:johnsonnw@missouri.edu)

Michelle Kruse – [kruse@mosba.org](mailto:kruse@mosba.org)

MO SW-PBS website: [pbissmissouri.org](http://pbissmissouri.org)

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