

Belonging: A Vital Part of School

And a Prerequisite to Learning

“This is my place; this is where I belong!” These are the confident words of people who have found acceptance, ownership, and affirmation in an environment where they feel they truly belong – a place or situation that is right for them.

A feeling of belonging is as essential to the mental, emotional, and physical health of a person as soil is to sprouting seeds of grass. Belonging is home, love, and nurture; it is acceptance, stability, and affirmation of individual worth. Every person seeks it; every human needs it; and every child deserves it and must have it if growth and learning are to take place.

At school, we know how essential it is for students to have genuine feeling of belonging, and we believe that this feeling of belonging is the baseline on which learning is built. Our commitment to this belief prompts us to take specific actions and employ some explicit strategies that will develop a sense of belonging in each student.

First, we plan for each young person who comes into the school to enter into an environment that is safe and secure. Safety and security on buses, playground and in the halls; safety and sanitation in the restrooms and in the cafeteria; and safety, security, and stability in the classrooms are all part of our planning before school begins. These matters remain a priority of highest concern throughout the school year as we continually seek to improve and maintain the physical environment.

When it comes to academics, we plan for and work toward the success that is envisioned. Remedial programs and intervention strategies are ready to provide

the help needed to ensure that each student has more intense remediation if it is appropriate.

We also work toward helping each student grow and develop socially and emotionally. The need for friendships and acceptance among peers is part of students’ feeling of belonging. These needs are nurtured and the entire school staff guides their fulfillment. Relationships with a variety of people, both students and adults, within the school setting feed the students’ feeling of belonging in school. Participation in activities and clubs also foster a feeling of belonging and for this reason we structure and sponsor a wide variety of events in which students can engage.

Sometimes it is easy to think that only young children need to feel they belong at school. However, older students also need assurances that they are accepted and can share in the ownership of their school.

Professional staff as well as support staff, make a concerted effort to help every student feel that someone cares about him or her and values his or her presence in the school. Teachers, administrators, and staff members make a conscious effort to be the students’ mentors, to listen to students and to let the students know that they are student-centered.

A genuine feeling of belonging is a prerequisite to learning and healthy development. Every student needs to be able to say, “This is my classroom; this is my school; this is my place. This is where I belong.” When students can say this out of the honesty of their own beliefs, then, and only then, can optimum learning take place.

Sharing in the ownership...

