

“When we celebrate the joy of coming together in a winning performance, in any arena, I’d submit it’s the deep bonds of connection the team experiences that are the most satisfying, meaningful, and important.”

Belong

By **Mark McKee**, Head of School



WHAT IS BELONGING AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

fUNDAMENTAL AND UNIVERSAL, belonging is a basic human need. Decades of research have shown that belonging — defined as a student’s feelings of being accepted, respected, and valued — has many benefits for students: better school performance and outcomes, positive self-belief and self-esteem, better physical and mental health and wellbeing, higher engagement and even better long-term future education and employment. We all recognize the desire to belong — and our approach at Viewpoint acknowledges its value and its necessity.

From the start, Viewpoint has valued teaching students that they are part of a community larger than themselves, and our strategic focus on wellbeing and belonging has its roots in our deeply felt school culture. We start life belonging to a family, and Viewpoint has long prized a “family-oriented culture” that brings families together, united by a shared mission and shared values. But to grow through childhood into adulthood — to be “world ready” — Viewpoint students need so much more. At school, students learn what it means to experience being part of a larger community beyond family, to take one’s place in classrooms and teams where we encounter people and families who are different from us, and yet the same. We learn to connect.

The learning from these experiences is powerful, and it compounds over time. Over the years of a Viewpoint experience, we aim to give students many such experiences, from the youngest children’s sense that they are part of a classroom where they are known, loved by their

teachers and accepted by classmates, to the many experiences and groups to which a student will belong — a grade level, a sports team, an orchestra ensemble, or the cast of a play. These opportunities to connect and contribute are another reason our commitments to the arts, athletics, and endeavors from a garden club to robotics to debate, are so vital to our educational mission.

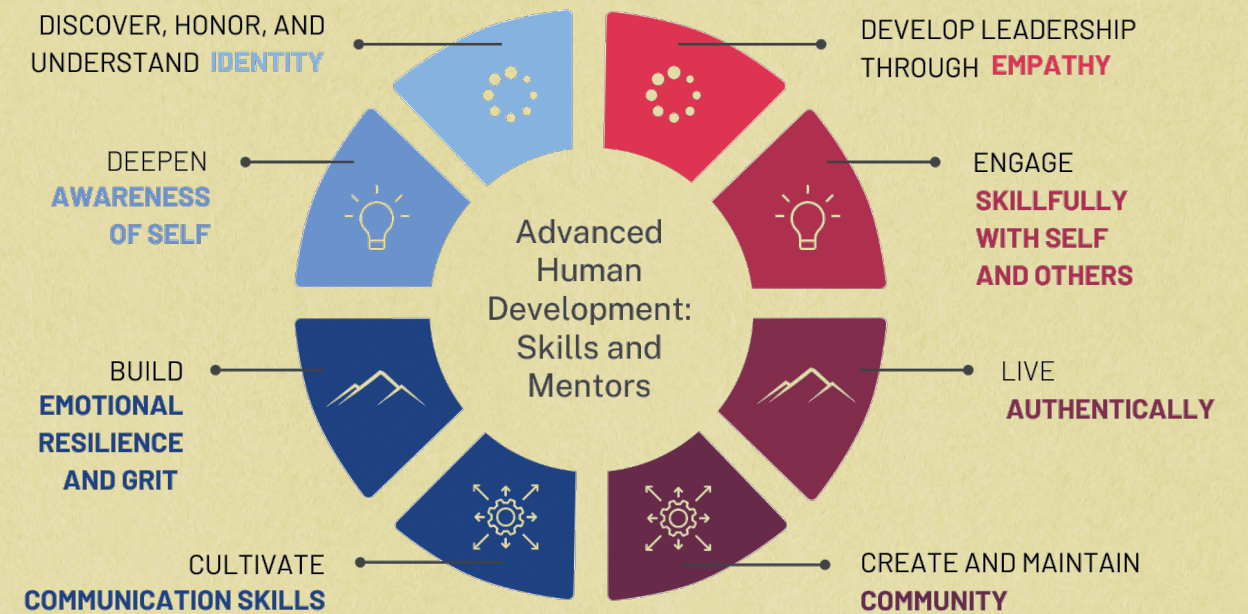
When we celebrate the joy of coming together in a winning performance, in any arena, I’d submit it’s the deep bonds of connection the team experiences that are the most satisfying, meaningful, and important. They are the prize — and when we all join to celebrate and cheer, we share in and multiply the impact. Perhaps this is why people love Convocation; they love Homecoming; they love our assemblies and holiday programs and ArtsFest, and they want more and more of that Viewpoint spirit at every turn. Just as you see in the stories in these pages, at these events we see and feel and experience the beauty of belonging.

“It is deeply heartening to watch students grow as a result of the caring community that holds them.”



Human Development and Advisory Programs

create spaces for belonging in our Middle and Upper Schools.



By **Cait Kamins**, Director of Human Development



THE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND ADVISORY programs create spaces for belonging in our Middle and Upper Schools. Both of these programs are rooted in the stated goal of connection. As we nurture relationships within each group of students, and between students and a caring adult, we witness connection deepen through our community as a whole.

The Human Development program consists of a required Ninth Grade course and two elective Tenth-Twelfth Grade courses, called Skills and Mentors. These classes strengthen personal and professional communication skills as they create connected groups. Students who move through the program learn to navigate emotions and lead conversations toward successful ends, and in our classroom setting, they deepen connections powerfully. Our cohorts engage in topics that are significant to them (often chosen by them), exploring individual obstacles and shared experiences. Through communication, they grow together, creating spaces where students are seen and celebrated as they are.

Our Advisory program runs from Sixth through Twelfth Grade. Every student is part of a group that meets weekly and stays together throughout their Middle or Upper School years. The program reflects the perspectives of many offices on campus, from counseling and Diversity, Inclusion, and Community Life to senior administration. Overarchingly, we work toward strengthening relationships: with fun, education, and discussion, we endeavor to ensure that each child feels wholly known and holistically cared for.

Like every impactful Human Development program, the strength of ours relies on the power of our people. We are fortunate to have exceptional faculty advising our students. Each grade level team is composed of faculty members from diverse disciplines, and all share the genuine, defining desire to create community for our students. Every Advisory group has a unique personality; each collection of students is helmed by a devoted adult.

It is deeply heartening to watch students grow as a result of the caring community that holds them. The more skillfully our children are able to inhabit themselves, the more ready they are to navigate their current lives outside of school, and their future lives in the world beyond Viewpoint. Both Human Development and Advisory teach students skills as they move through these moments — it is our privilege to help create spaces where they know they belong.

How do you make families feel like this is where they and their child belong?



By **Laurel Baker Tew**, Assistant Head of School for Enrollment Management



I'VE SPENT MY CAREER in the field of admission and enrollment management at both the college level and in TK-12. There's the old saying that, working in education, you get to touch the future. What's even better than that is working in admission, where you get to meet the leading edge of that future and help them on their educational path.

Today, we understand so much more about that educational path than we did a generation ago — about our responsibility as educators to the future world readiness of our students. And it all starts with the concept of belonging.

We know from interviewing these students and families what a profound impact belonging has on individual well-being, social cohesion, and overall community development. It promotes psychological well-being and personal development, encouraging our students to explore their talents, build confidence, and develop skills and abilities.

The Admission Team members and I can see it instantly when an applicant feels a sense of belonging to the school at which they're currently enrolled. And it's painfully obvious when they don't.

Belonging has a direct impact on a student's academic success. When our students feel connected to their school and peers, they are more motivated to pursue lofty academic goals, and to support one another during times of challenge, stress, or adversity. Belonging ties in directly to supporting Viewpoint's core values of love, honor, excellence, imagination, and optimism.

For parents, the concept of belonging is just as important and begins with their experience in the Admission Office. When parents feel connected to their child's school, it helps to create an inclusive and supportive environment where they feel valued, respected, heard, and connected to the school community.

Nowadays, it is incumbent upon Admission Offices to serve as the first ambassadors for their schools — to introduce prospective students and families to not only the tangibles but just as importantly, the intangibles as well. Creating a sense of belonging for families in a school environment is crucial for fostering a positive and inclusive atmosphere.

- Welcoming atmosphere: Families need to be greeted warmly when they come to campus; provided with clear directions and information; and a comfortable waiting area. It never hurts when Viewpoint Student Ambassadors drop by to say a “hello” of their own. Their voices and experiences are golden.
- Regular communication and invitations to school events. Keeping them apprised at all times about next steps, important policies, information they need to know to move through the admission process. Encouraging them to follow Viewpoint on social media.
- Welcome events, orientation, and transition programs, for both students and parents: Orientation programs for new families help them settle in and raise their level of familiarity. Parent and Student Ambassadors connect new students and parents with existing ones to facilitate networking and relationship-building.
- Parent involvement opportunities: Our office encourages opportunities for parents to get involved in school activities through the VSSA (Viewpoint School Service Association) and PPDI (Parent Partnership for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion).
- Cultural celebrations and diversity appreciation: One of Viewpoint's greatest strengths is the rich diversity of backgrounds and cultures of the families within our school community. Parent-to-parent welcome activities, events, festivals, and cultural showcases allow students and parents to share their traditions, foods, and customs, encouraging respect for different cultural perspectives.
- Parent education and support: Acknowledging to our parents that raising kids today is hard. Offering workshops, seminars, and resources on parenting, child development, and relevant topics that support families in their role as their child's primary educators. This demonstrates Viewpoint's commitment to the well-being and success of the entire family.

The Acceptance of Belonging

“Belonging can be defined as a feeling of security, comfort, or happiness being a member of a particular group and also of having good relationships with the other members of the group because they see you, welcome you, and accept you.”



By **Patricia Jackson**, Director of Diversity, Inclusion, and Community Life



ULTIVATING A SENSE OF BELONGING among all members of the Viewpoint community is the focus and the mission of my work here as Director of Diversity, Inclusion, and Community Life. I am all about belonging.

Many of us live, learn, and operate in spaces that most often were not designed for or encouraging diversity of thought or being. So, it is important for us to create on our campus those opportunities where we can get to know each other—from our joys and fears to our challenges and triumphs—in a sense to explore and enjoy the fullness of who each of us truly are.

All of us arrive at school with a variety of unseen objects in our proverbial backpacks—some heavy, others simply omnipresent realities. Since we all carry such objects on our journeys, it also becomes our responsibility to meet each other where and how we are, and in the process to both lighten and share each other's burdens. The experiences and knowledge we can learn by doing this are important life lessons and key to meeting the world ready.

Having been a high school English, speech and drama teacher, I naturally lean into the power of words. Why? Because words matter—they form our thoughts, and our thoughts shape our actions. Through words we create intentional connections. With respectful words we build trusting relationships. Using words we share diverse opinions and

perspectives. And words are the source of purposeful and powerful storytelling.

In partial response to formal and informal data around diversity and belonging at Viewpoint, including some of the results from student “fish bowls” that were held during 2021 and the NAIS Assessment of Inclusivity that was completed in the winter of 2022, I partnered with Director of Theatre, Scott Feldsher, to build a creative platform that would offer students an opportunity to explore, develop, and share their stories—how to use their words. With the help of a visiting artist/teacher, Monica Hannush, students were led through weeks of self-discovery, discussion, writing, and reflection. Along the way, VOSOVOS—*Viewpoint: Our Stories. Our Voices. Our Stage.* was born.

This highly successful student-generated theater production provided an opportunity for audiences of peers, family, and community members to learn first hand how students feel about a variety of topics that are important to them. Candidly, they shared personal stories of being ignored by busy parents and caregivers, forced assimilation, and many more examples of non-acceptance. It was, however, their moment of being seen and heard. And, through the sharing and acting out these stories of exclusion, they in turn experienced a sense of inclusion as a troupe of actors working together and also pointed out to the audience the alternative path, the importance of belonging.

ca'ma-ra-de'rie

noun

1. a mutual trust and friendship among a group of people who have usually known each other for a long time or gone through some kind of shared experience together.

2. a spirit of friendly good-fellowship

What is the overall philosophy of the Athletics department which makes everyone feel a sense of belonging and that they are a part of the Athletic community?

Each of our teams provides students with community and camaraderie. We offer our students as many team opportunities as possible. We also work with every student to expand their understanding that, much like life, everything in the athletic arena, is earned and not given.

What does it mean to be a part of a team, and what sets Viewpoint's Athletic program apart from those of other schools?

Ultimately, teamwork is about learning what it means to be a part of something bigger than oneself and working together toward a common goal. In the course of sports, there are many, many layers about what it means to be on a team and what one learns while part of a team. The invaluable life lessons learned through participating in athletics can only be experienced and appreciated by those who live out a commitment to a team. While other schools may be trending away from mass sports participation, Viewpoint values the contributions made by all levels of

athletes, whether it be our first-time participants or our seasoned CIF Champions.

At the end of the day, there are very few experiences in life that can replicate the moments, connections, and relationships forged between fellow athletes through teamwork, competition and fair play.

How do you strike a balance between being competitive and building the spirit of camaraderie?

We strike a balance between competition and camaraderie by intentionally creating safe spaces within our teams so our athletes can both share and yet be vulnerable as they learn from and grow through experiences gained on the field of play.

While the goal is to be competitive, we create an experience that remains about our student-athletes growth through their journey in the athletic environment. We incorporate both team-building, as well as social activities throughout the season to create not only a team, but also a community in which our athletes can flourish.

Athletics: Belonging and Community Through Comraderie

By **Patrick Moyal**, Athletic Director

INTRODUCING OUR

Viewpoint Librarians

SUE JEAN WOODMANSEE '01 is Viewpoint’s Primary and Lower School Librarian. Sue Jean graduated from Viewpoint School in 2001, and holds a Master’s degree in Architecture (M. Arch I) from the University of California, Los Angeles as well as a Master’s degree in Library and Information Sciences (MLIS) from San Jose State University. Sue Jean teaches library classes to students in Grades 3-5, and is actively developing and shaping the library’s book collection to exemplify Viewpoint’s mission, vision, and values. She loves reading fiction, listening to memoirs, and exploring alpine lakes.

BEVERLY RUPE SCHWARZ, Viewpoint’s Primary School librarian, has worked in the Viewpoint libraries since 2005. She started as a parent volunteer in 1995 when her daughter Madeline (Viewpoint class of 2008) started Junior Kindergarten. Beverly earned her Master’s in Library and Information Science from San Jose State University. Beverly enjoys teaching library classes for students in Grades TK-2 and sharing new books with Viewpoint’s youngest students. She often draws from her certifications in yoga and meditation to make learning fun.

LAURA MONJOY has served as the Middle and Upper School Librarian at Viewpoint School since 2017. She earned her Master’s in Library and

Information Science from the University of Pittsburgh, and has been working as a librarian for the past twelve years. In addition to teaching Digital Literacy lessons and research instruction lessons in both divisions, she actively collaborates with the Middle School Literary Honors Society and the Upper School Literary Scholars Society to support book clubs and workshops. An avid reader in a wide variety of genres, Laura is passionate about fostering a love of reading in students, and helping each student find their next favorite book.

SARAH DAVIS has served as Director of Libraries at Viewpoint School since 2009. She earned her Master’s in Library Service from Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey. She is on the board of the Association of Independent School Libraries (AISL) and SoCaLIS, the southern California independent school library consortium. Sarah is the volunteer manager of the SoCaLIS Shared Overdrive consortium, which provides e-books and audiobooks to students at 60 independent schools in Southern California. Sarah actively strives to build connections between the Viewpoint community and the campus libraries, and started the Parent Book Chat program in 2020.

OUR VIEWPOINT LIBRARIES ARE

Homes on Campus Where Everyone Belongs

By **Sarah Davis**, Director of Libraries

EACH MORNING as I arrive on campus, I have the opportunity to appreciate the many ways that Viewpoint’s libraries foster belonging and community at our school.

Entering the doors of the Fletcher Family Library, I am greeted by students who are eager to connect, and who are ready to learn. As a Viewpoint parent and an independent school educator, I am proud that our campus libraries and library programs serve to develop and encourage community engagement.

In so many ways, the Benjamin Franklin Library, in the Primary and Lower School, and the Fletcher Family Library, in the Middle and Upper School, serve from the heart of our community. These state-of-the-art library facilities are not only beautiful but are also functional. Carefully chosen flexible furnishings make it possible to host gatherings large and small, including over 200 parent events, student meetings, and special programs each year.

In her bestselling book, *The Library Book*, author Susan Orlean writes that libraries are “physical spaces belonging to a community where we gather to share information.” She asserts that while we increasingly access information in a variety of formats, libraries will become “our town squares, a place that is home when you aren’t at home.” This is especially true at Viewpoint.

Over the last decade, our libraries have evolved to become more like Viewpoint’s “town square” by providing a “home” for uniquely trained and dedicated Learning Specialists. Moreover, the Fletcher Family

Library includes our Office for Diversity, Inclusion, and Community Life, which, by it’s mission, seeks for each and every student a sense of belonging.

In addition to managing our print and digital library collections, Viewpoint’s professionally trained librarians create community connections by offering and supporting programs to establish a life-long love of reading and learning. These include collaborating on our campus-wide student independent and summer reading initiatives, Literary Honors Societies, the VSSA (Viewpoint School Service Association) book fair, the VSSA Parent Education program, and PPDI (Parent Partnership for Diversity and Inclusion) heritage month displays.

The recent years challenged all of us to create an increased sense of belonging in a strange and distanced world. Viewpoint’s librarians rose to meet this need by establishing new and engaging ways to connect both students and families with our campus community. From pajama story times and library classes on Zoom, to virtual author visits, as well as the creation of a successful parent book club, our librarians built bridges of belonging in an effort to connect all with their academic home.

As I leave campus at the end of each day, there are always wonderful moments of teaching and connection on which to reflect. This is my joy. As I look forward, I am sure that in another ten years our libraries will have evolved again, but, regardless of the changes, I know that they will still be homes away from home, our common town square, and a place where every Patriot belongs.

DISCOVERING BOOKS

Where We Belong

By **Sue Jean Woodmansee '01**, Primary and Lower School Librarian

THE LIBRARIANS of the Benjamin Franklin and Fletcher Family Libraries strive to create a sense of belonging by embracing the richness of our community as a source of strength and inspiration. This diversity is reflected back to our students through the wonderful range of literary offerings from which they can read. This is one of many ways that ensures our students feel seen and supported.

School libraries are key learner-centered spaces on our campus that welcome students of different ages, grades, and abilities. The libraries and librarians are a constant at the heart of the students’ educational experience, which underscores the importance of maintaining a space where every student feels an innate sense of belonging.

In 1990, Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop, professor emerita at The Ohio State University, wrote an essay about the transformative power of diverse children’s literature. She observed that:

“Books are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange. These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created or recreated by the author. When lighting conditions are just right, however, a window can also be a mirror...”

Reading, then, becomes a means of self-affirmation, and readers often seek their mirrors in books.”

— Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom, Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop, 1990

In Viewpoint’s libraries, the books on our shelves are mirrors that reflect the richness and diversity of our students, as well as windows and sliding glass doors that help cultivate understanding, empathy, and love.

Both our librarians and reading faculty actively strive to foster belonging by connecting students to books that feature diverse literary themes and characters. Many readers are aware of the widely appreciated authors who are awarded the prestigious Newbery and Caldecott Medals from the American Library Association. However, there are a wide variety of awards that recognize authors who strive to highlight characters and themes from a diversity of perspectives. These awards, listed in the sidebar, include the Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature, the Coretta Scott King Award, the Sydney Taylor award, the American Indian Youth Literature Award, and more.

We encourage parents to visit the Libraries page of our website to find our Viewpoint Libraries LibGuide to learn more about these awards, and to find high-quality books for our young readers.

BOOK AWARDS

American Indian Youth Literature Award

The AIYLA identifies and honors the very best writing and illustrations by Native Americans and Indigenous peoples of North America.

Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature

The goal of the Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature is to honor and recognize individual work about Asian/Pacific Americans and their heritage, based on literary and artistic merit.

Carter G. Woodson Book Award

This award is intended to encourage the writing, publishing, and dissemination of outstanding social studies books for young readers that treat topics related to ethnic minorities and race relations sensitively and accurately.

Coretta Scott King Award

The Coretta Scott King Book Awards are given annually to outstanding African American authors and illustrators of books for children and young adults that demonstrate an appreciation of African American culture and universal human values.

Ezra Jack Keats Award

The Ezra Jack Keats Award was created to nurture illustrators and writers, early in their careers, who create extraordinary books that reflect our diverse population, the universal experience of childhood and the strength of family and community.

Jane Addams Children’s Book Award

The Jane Addams Children’s Book Award annually recognizes children’s books of literary and aesthetic excellence that effectively engage children in thinking about peace, social justice, global community, and equity for all people.

Notable Books for a Global Society

The Notable Books for a Global Society (NBGS) list was developed to help students, teachers, and families identify books that promote understanding of and appreciation for the world’s full range of diverse cultures and ethnic and racial groups.

Pura Belpré Award

The Pura Belpré Award is presented annually to a Latino/Latina writer and illustrator whose work best portrays, affirms, and celebrates the Latino cultural experience in an outstanding work of literature for children and youth.

Schneider Family Book Award

The Schneider Family Book Awards honor an author or illustrator for a book that embodies an artistic expression of the disability experience for child and adolescent audiences.

Stonewall Book Awards

The first and most enduring award for LGBTQIA+ books honored for exceptional merit relating to the gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender experience.

Sydney Taylor Book Award

The Sydney Taylor Book Award is presented annually to outstanding books for children and teens that authentically portray the Jewish experience.

The Walter Awards

The Walter Dean Myers Awards for Outstanding Children’s Literature recognize diverse authors whose works feature diverse main characters and address diversity in a meaningful way.