

BELONGING PROTOCOL

Purpose

Belonging is the experience of being accepted, valued, and included as your full self. It can be cultivated through relationships, equitable access to meaningful participation, and a culture of psychological safety. Fostering a deep sense of belonging for every student remains essential in MPCSD. Our Belonging Protocol centers students while recognizing the interconnectedness of belonging among families and educators. This approach is rooted in our Core Values, especially Inclusivity and Compassion. This protocol aims to strengthen a culture that celebrates individuality, fosters unity, and examines systems to ensure they support equity, access, and social-emotional well-being.

Examine Belonging

Please use these guiding questions to examine practices, policies, and daily interactions through the lens of belonging. This protocol can be used individually or in teams. As educators, our decisions can either enhance or hinder belonging – this tool encourages us to pause, reflect, and consider how our actions impact belonging.

Note on the Graphic

This circular graphic depiction of belonging was created by MPCSD art teacher Summerlynn Burlew. It represents how she interprets a sense of belonging as a journey or discovery without a set beginning or endpoint.

1. START WITH SELF-REFLECTION

- How might my identity, lived experiences, and biases impact how I'm showing up in this moment?
- In my role, how can I help to create more equitable outcomes and experiences?

2. RECOGNIZE THE IMPACT

- Who is most affected by a strong sense of belonging in this context?
- How does a sense of belonging impact an individual's well-being, engagement, safety, or growth?

3. IDENTIFY CONNECTION POINTS

- Where do spaces of connection already exist in this context?
- What barriers prevent some individuals from feeling a sense of belonging?

4. TAKE ACTION

- What shifts can we make to strengthen belonging?
- What unintended consequences might arise from these well-intended actions?

5. REVISIT AND REFLECT

- How did your actions impact a sense of belonging, especially for those most impacted?
- What might you continue, stop, or try next time?

MENLO PARK
CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

THE BELONGING PROTOCOL IN PRACTICE

The Belonging Protocol can help us assess the impact of our decisions on students' sense of belonging. Our theory of action is that intentional reflection can lead to deeper belonging across the district. Some examples of scenarios that could benefit from applying the Belonging Protocol include: selecting learning materials, guiding responses to student behavior, planning family engagement events, reflecting on hiring and onboarding practices.

SELF REFLECTION



We begin by exploring our own identities, experiences, and roles — and how they shape our perspectives and decisions. We ground decision-making in awareness of identity and positionality.

RECOGNIZE THE IMPACT



We pause to examine how our actions, practices, and systems affect others. Educators can use qualitative and quantitative data from students, staff, and families to better understand their experiences. Then, we reflect on how people experience our actions differently.

IDENTIFY CONNECTIONS



To strengthen belonging, we can notice where belonging already exists — in clubs, spaces, or routines — then build on those. Also notice who is and who is not participating to understand what barriers to belonging might exist.

TAKE ACTION



When we notice our own perspectives, others' experiences, and patterns of participation, we can take thoughtful action to build where belonging is strong and improve where it could grow. We consider whose voices are included in the decision-making process and how even small shifts can foster deeper connection. Our theory of action encourages us to ask, "What do we believe will shift when we make this change?"

REVISIT AND REFLECT



After trying a new approach, examine evidence and notice how a sense of belonging changed - for better or worse. Did the shift increase participation or connection? Build on what worked, stop what may have created new barriers, and consider new actions. Reflection is ongoing — it brings us back to the start of the protocol with deeper insight.