MES Weekly Update

from the Superintendent of Schools

Week of November 9, 2026

Marlborough Elementary School Vision: ***To inspire wonder, awe, and curiosity and to motivate young minds to embrace learning.***

Honor to the soldier and sailor everywhere, who bravely bears his country's cause.

~ Abraham Lincoln

This Week

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
	National Young Readers Week	Veterans Day Salute at MES WEAR RED, WHITE, & BLUE	NO SCHOOL Veterans Day  *Thank you, Veterans!*	Picture Retake Dav	 Make Kindness the Norm	

This Friday is World Kindness Day – Let's start in Marlborough



Join us on Friday and perform one Random Act of Kindness.

If our students, along with the members of our community, work together and make a **one-day commitment to promote kindness** through our actions, it can have a ripple effect that moves well beyond the borders of Marlborough.

Every act of kindness impacts at least one person – and may inspire another kindness. A world-wide ripple begins with ***one*** kind act.

Excerpt from -

How small acts of kindness and connection really can change the world, according to psych research by Liza Hinchley

Political chasms, wars, oppression … it's easy to feel hopeless and helpless watching these dark forces play out. Could any of us ever really make a meaningful difference in the face of so much devastation?

Given the scale of the world's problems, it might feel like the small acts of human connection and solidarity that you do have control over are like putting Band-Aids on bullet wounds. It can feel naive to imagine that small acts could make any global difference.

As a psychologist, human connection researcher and audience member, I was inspired to hear musician Hozier offer a counterpoint at a performance this year. "The little acts of love and solidarity that we offer each other can have powerful impact … " he told the crowd. "I believe the core of people on the whole is good – I genuinely do. I'll die on that hill."

I'm happy to report that the science agrees with him.

Research shows that individual acts of kindness and connection can have a real impact on global change when these acts are collective. This is true at multiple levels: between individuals, between people and institutions, and between cultures.

This relational micro-activism is a powerful force for change – and serves as an antidote to hopelessness because unlike global-scale issues, these small acts are within individuals' control.

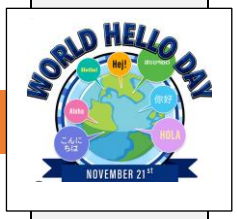
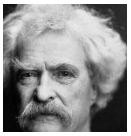
A personal connection makes you more willing to find common ground.



Every human being is embedded in their own network with the people and world around them, what psychologists call their social ecology. Compassionate change at any level of someone's social ecology – internally, interpersonally or structurally – can affect all the other levels, in a kind of positive feedback loop, or **upward spiral**.

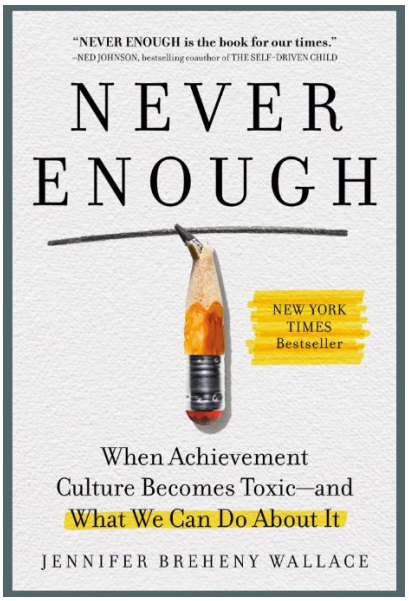
November/December 2026

Send information on school sponsored and community events to psmith@marlborough.k12.ct.us for inclusion.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
	Board of FInance Town Hall 6:30 PM RHAM Board of Education @ RHAM Middle 6:30 PM	Board of Selectmen Town Hall 7:00 PM	Mickey Mouse Day  	In 1863, President Lincoln delivered the Gettysburg Address.  Marlborough Board of Education MES Library 6:30 PM BUDGET DISCUSSION	PTO Bingo NIght	World Hello Day Say "Hello" to 10 people! https://worldhelloday.org/ 
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
		MES Building Committee MES Library 6:30 PM	Early Dismissal Thanksgiving	Thanksgiving Holiday Weekend 		
29	30	December 1	2	3	4	5
	 Mark Twain's (Samuel Clemens) Birthday	GIVING TUESDAY Board of Selectmen Town Hall 7:00 PM		Make & Share a Handmade Gift Day 	 December 4-12	
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
 Hartford Wolfpack PTO Event	MES PTO MES Library 6:30 PM	 Music Department CONCERT 6:00 PM	EARLY RELEASE Professional Development Music Department CONCERT 6:00 PM SNOW DATE	Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted in 1948 by the United Nations General Assembly	Friday is PJ Day!  	
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
	RHAM Board of Education @ RHAM Middle 6:30 PM	Board of Selectmen Town Hall 7:00 PM	Boston Tea Party 1773 	National Maple Syrup Day  Marlborough Board of Education MES Library 6:30 PM		

Notes

Can we reduce the stress our children feel as they get older…? Start now.



The book, *Never Enough,* highlights one of the biggest concerns of our time: **our kids are performing, but they are not thriving.**

Even though our population is young at MES, how we raise our children, how we prioritize what is important, and how we celebrate their interests makes a big difference in their mental health and wellness.

"Wallace shows what kids need from the adults in the room is not more pressure, but to feel like they matter, and have intrinsic self-worth not contingent upon external achievements. Parents and educators who adopt the language and values of mattering help children see themselves as a valuable contributor to a larger community. And in an ironic twist, kids who receive consistent feedback that they matter no matter what are more likely to have the resilience, self-confidence, and psychological security to thrive."

Teens are overwhelmed by pressure to achieve. How can parents restore balance?

By Linda Flanagan in MindShift

When journalist Jennifer Wallace learned about the 2019 Varsity Blues scandal, in which fancy, well-to-do parents paid a sketchy consultant to cheat their children into elite colleges, she didn't buy the conventional wisdom about the story. Were they all just shallow snobs desperate to preserve their flimsy status? A mother herself, living in a community where nearly everyone, parent and child alike, fretted about college admissions — and flogged themselves to secure a spot at a top school — she believed something deeper was at work. Somehow, families had absorbed the message that a kid's only hope for a decent life was to grind it out as a child and pray that the gods of higher education would bless their applications.

Wallace explores the roots and effects of this problem in her new book, Never Enough: When Achievement Culture Becomes Toxic — And What We Can Do About It. Pressure isn't limited to children of the well-off, Wallace explains. She reports that as many as one-third of high school students feel the compulsion to achieve, a function of widespread social and economic transformations that have altered American society and rattled parents.

"I'm not anti-ambition or anti-achievement," Wallace told me. She is a striver herself, and cheers the pursuit of excellence. But something has gone off the rails when **one in four kids believe that they matter to their parents for what they can do rather than who they are**, which Wallace found in her research. Or when 70% of young adults sense that they're more loved when they perform well in school or work. Or when 42% of teenagers feel "consistently sad or hopeless," as the CDC discovered, and nearly three-quarters of high school students report feeling often or always worried about getting into their preferred college, as Challenge Success researchers recently found.

Parents have long worried about their kids losing ground vis-à-vis *them;* this "status safeguarding" is understandable. Fearful that their children's margin for error has disappeared, contemporary parents feel compelled to get their kids on the path to success early, and never to waver from it. Admission to a top college seems like the best hedge against the unpredictability of modern life.

"To protect our kids, we want to strap a life vest on them, and we call that 'college,'" Wallace told me. "But that very life vest is drowning too many of them."

A flotation device that would actually keep kids above water is the conviction that they matter, irrespective of their class rank or batting average. Wallace explains how parents can shift their own mindsets about achievement and begin to help their children feel seen.

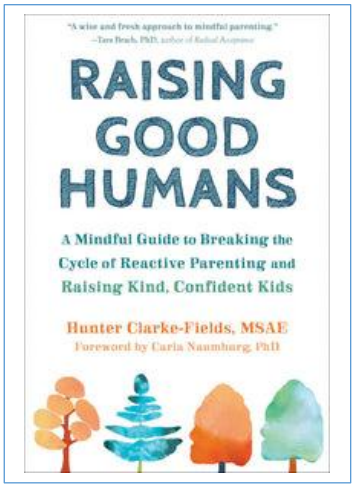
- **Parents should start with their own well-being.** Consumed and exhausted by their children's activities, many mothers and fathers have abandoned the personal relationships that will help sustain them. As many as 60% of those Wallace surveyed confessed to letting their kids' activities crowd out grown-up time with friends. This is so despite research showing that friends are more likely to generate happiness than kids or partners. To counteract this development, she encourages parents to make their own adult relationships a priority. Create "go-to committees" of select friends who agree to meet regularly and discuss their adult concerns.
- **Protect children from "grind culture."** Insisting on limits is a form of love. Hold them back, occasionally, from activities that will only wear them down. By resisting the cultural imperative to keep kids constantly busy and performing, parents also teach their children an invaluable life lesson: genuine success means knowing when to push and when to let up. No one can be fully devoted to every endeavor, and helping kids figure out when to let the homework slide, say, better equips them for adult life.
- **Embrace healthy competition and cooperation.** High-stakes academics and athletics can be cutthroat, driving kids to treat their peers as rivals rather than partners. Add social media to the mix, and it's easy to understand why young people might be wary of their classmates; high school can feel like a zero-sum game. Parents can model and talk about the value of deep friendships and interdependence to counteract that dynamic. This means acknowledging others' contributions to personal success, asking for help instead of feigning omnipotence, and openly admiring others' strengths — which might be superior to our own — and viewing them as exemplars rather than opponents.
- **Encourage children to look beyond themselves.** A largely unspoken side effect of achievement culture is the unpalatable effect of all that parental doting on kids' self-concept: it nourishes narcissism. To slay that demon and promote well-being, adults would do well to open kids' eyes to the wider world. Invite to think about *why* they're striving for A's; where does this all lead? Don't allow a child's pursuits to interfere with their responsibilities to others. No, you may not skip your grandmother's 80th birthday for a soccer match. Sorry, your test is important, but so is the laundry.
- **Let children know they matter.** Mothers and fathers should be explicit: tell their children that they matter. They also can show it, by offering physical affection, communicating with warmth and kindness, and simply playing together. Resist the reflex to ask, "how was the test?" on first seeing them after school and greet them once a day the way you would a new puppy. Healthy kids know that their parents love them unreservedly.

Wallace reiterated her conviction that having high standards isn't at odds with unconditional love. "I am ambitious for more than just achievement," she said about her own children. There's family, friendships, community, creative ventures — all these, approached wisely, lead to a rich life. "We've gotten so off-kilter," she said. "I am suggesting a balance."

Other articles and resources for teachers and parents:

- *"Talking with your children about stress"*
- *"Creating calm: How to talk to your children when they are stressed"*
- *"Stressed out kids: signs and strategies"*

One more book recommendation:



*"**Raising Good Humans** is the guidebook parents need to instill confidence, mental health, and independence in our children while building a durable relationship with them. Written with the compassion, clarity, and truth of someone who's helped families with a variety of issues, Raising Good Humans is chock-full of insights, strategies, and exercises for becoming a more mindful parent. Hunter Clarke-Fields is a persuasive evangelist for the power of meditation in our lives and our children's lives. Her book will transform your life for the better—if you embrace the journey. One of the best parenting books I've ever read."*

— Katherine Reynolds Lewis, author of ***The Good News About Bad Behavior***

Our children's education is not the place to experiment

In education we are exploring and questioning the role of AI in student learning. There is some good advice out there, but there appear to be several studies that are seriously flawed. While on the surface, some ideas seem logical, there just is not enough information on AI that supports a long-term benefit to students.

Before you read the information below, read the **Marlborough Elementary School AI Guidance** that will be reviewed by the Board of Education at their meeting on November 19. The guidance is a conservative approach to AI in our classrooms



(Getty Images)

Discovery Education highlights that a "balanced stance on education and artificial intelligence focuses on preserving human relationships and critical thinking while integrating AI as a supportive thought partner." In a recent article, they highlight the following Pros of AI in Education:

Enhanced Personalized Learning

AI automatically adjusts content, giving students targeted support and reducing the need for teachers to create multiple versions of the same assignments.

Reduced Teacher Workload

AI reduces planning time by generating drafts, questions, rubrics, summaries, and sample responses. Teachers remain in control of instructional quality, with AI reducing the work required on the front end.

One veteran teacher recently told me, "It gives me time back—time that I can spend working with kids instead of creating worksheets."

Immediate Student Feedback

Students can revise their work and get feedback right away, rather than waiting until the next class. This helps them build confidence and take more responsibility for their own learning, while allowing teachers to step in when it matters most.

Increased Accessibility

AI removes barriers by offering translation, captioning, vocabulary support, and alternative formats. This helps more students access grade-level tasks without constant support.

Better Use of Data

AI helps schools sort through large amounts of data and highlight patterns that can be easy to miss day to day. This allows teachers and support teams to identify concerns earlier and plan targeted instruction more efficiently.

Increasing Student Engagement

When used correctly, AI-supported tools can draw students into learning in ways that feel active and purposeful. In many classrooms—particularly in STEM—students are designing, testing, and experimenting through simulations and interactive tasks rather than passively completing worksheets. The result is often higher interest, increased participation, and more active learning.

There is a Ted Talk worth listening to: How Students Should Be Learning With AI. The premise is that assignments should be designed so AI does not bypass the mental effort, drafting, and critical analysis required for durable learning on the part of students. The concern is that shortcut-seeking can degrade long-term skill retention.

The real concern, however, is the lack of credible education research on the benefits of AI to our students. See the article below:

An Audit Finds Serious Flaws in Research on AI in Education **by Jill Barshay,** The Hechinger Report

'Anybody can sort of say that they have evidence for anything,' a top scholar says.

Does artificial intelligence help students learn? That's a question many teachers and parents want answered, as the new educational technology is rapidly spreading in classrooms.

Normally, meta-analyses would be the right place to look, since they're supposed to gather a scattered body of research and make sense of it by pointing to where the preponderance of evidence lies. And indeed, there are 39 of them, all reporting substantial benefits for AI in education.

But it appears that **the studies synthesizing that evidence are themselves unreliable** — and the peer-review process failed to catch the problems.

"**This is not trustworthy evidence**," said Justin Reich, an associate professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the director of MIT's Teaching Systems Lab, who hosted a webinar on Oct. 20 to discuss the problem of the growing number of positive AI meta-analyses. "All of these meta-analyses are flawed."

A forensic audit of 14 of the 39 meta-analyses has found serious conceptual and statistical flaws. Appearing in journals by prominent publishers, including Springer Nature, Wiley, SAGE and Taylor & Francis, these 14 papers have accumulated more than 3,000 citations and continue to rack up 200 citations a month, according to Google Scholar — implying that AI's effectiveness is settled science. One meta-analysis has been retracted, almost a year after its May 2025 publication in a Nature journal after two Norwegian scholars lodged a complaint.

The new audit was conducted by Patrick O'Neill, a community college professor at the Bloomington, Indiana, campus of Ivy Tech, who examined a sample of the underlying studies and the statistical methods used to combine their results in meta-analyses. O'Neill found recurring patterns of errors, some of which he said could easily have been detected just by reading the study abstracts.

During the Oct. 20 webinar, O'Neill described a constellation of "impossible statistics," "hallucinated references" and "overstated conclusions." Some of the underlying studies even cited references to papers published about generative AI before that technology was released to the public. Links to the citations sometimes led to unrelated studies.

Many of the aggregated studies didn't even measure how much AI boosted learning. For example, nursing students who studied for three hours a week with an instructor using AI were compared to peers who had no study sessions at all (of course they tested better). Students who played video games and answered AI-generated questions outperformed students who did neither. In another experiment, students who chatted with an AI bot reported feeling less anxious.

Beth Tipton, a leading meta-analysis expert and a professor at Northwestern University, who joined her colleagues Reich and O'Neill in the critique, characterized as "crazy" the idea of conducting a very broad meta-analysis encompassing all the various uses of AI in education.

Tipton compared it to conducting a meta-analysis of math education. Is math education effective? That depends on how the math is taught. A thoughtful meta-analysis might narrow the question down to a specific approach, such as whether spatial learning interventions improve math skills. Similarly, Tipton said, how AI is used needs to be specified before conducting a meta-analysis of it.

"Do we mean people using [educational] apps and programs that include AI in them, like Khan Academy? Do we mean giving students access to Claude?" Tipton asked.

A big concern in the current batch of AI meta-analyses, O'Neill said, is "publication bias." He found that two-thirds of the calls for papers for AI in education specifically invited research on its benefits, "seemingly disinviting null or negative results." That means the meta-analyses are effectively "manufacturing evidence" by aggregating selected, positive results, he said.

Recrunching the numbers

O'Neill is now conducting his own AI meta-analysis, using proper statistical methods, and arriving at a far less sanguine picture. He found that the outcomes from 44 well-designed experiments varied widely, from very helpful to very harmful

to students. The results averaged out to roughly zero, according to O'Neill's preliminary calculations. This doesn't mean educators should conclude that AI is harmless, on average. It depends on how it's used.

Susanna Loeb, a Stanford professor of education who also joined the meta-analysis critique webinar, pointed out that her team has **collected almost 900 studies** on AI in education and determined that **only 20 of them** were of high enough quality to be included in a recent summary of the evidence for her AI Hub for Education. Her team has since identified 32 more studies and is soon to update that summary. But, she said, it's still too early to conduct a meta-analysis that would be useful to school leaders or teachers. Very few of the high-quality studies take place in K-12 schools in the United States.

Northwestern's Tipton worries that the fast-growing field of meta-analysis has outstripped the supply of experts qualified to review the work. More scholars are conducting meta-analyses because they're quicker and cheaper than running experiments, and they can attract lots of citations for ambitious professors. The hunger for evidence about AI has made this topic a particular magnet for meta-analysis and spawned something of an AI meta-analysis cottage industry.

Tipton said she gets requests to review meta-analysis papers every day but can't accept them all. Checking the underlying studies can take days, and peer review is unpaid volunteer work.

Medicine has flawed research, too, Tipton said, but it has gatekeepers to help separate the wheat from the chaff. The Food and Drug Administration evaluates evidence before approving drugs, and insurers review research when deciding which treatments to cover. Education has no comparable safeguards.

A 'no-man's land'

"In education, it's kind of no-man's land," Tipton said. "Anybody can sort of say that they have evidence for anything, and share it with anybody, and consumers, schools, teachers, parents are left to try to wade through that and make sense of it. It's incredibly frustrating."

The researchers appealed to philanthropic funders and the National Science Foundation for help supporting rigorous, reliable research syntheses. "Maybe our model of voluntary peer review doesn't work very well for landmark" studies on critical topics in education, Reich said. "Peer review's not working. Meta-analysis is not working."

Until truly reliable evidence emerges, the researchers advised educators to experiment cautiously with AI, starting with small groups of students and monitoring the results. Even introducing AI into a 300-student lecture course could be risky, O'Neill said.

In other words, teachers are on their own to experiment in their own classrooms. Still, it's encouraging to see education researchers calling out flaws in their own field and trying to fix them.

Other sites of interest

- Common Sense Rules for the AI Era
- How AI Vaporizes Longterm Learning
- UNESCO's Artificial Intelligence in Education



Thoughts from the Superintendent



Belonging – one of our students' greatest needs in their development

According to the National Children's Bureau, the number one factor in influencing school belonging is **Teacher-pupil relationships.**

> *"Quality and consistency in teacher-pupil interactions are essential for building a lasting sense of connection. Friendliness and fairness from teachers are highly valued by pupils and significantly influence their sense of belonging. Supportive and individualized attention from teachers, where pupils feel seen and heard, plays a crucial role in fostering this connection."*

According to The Kids Mental Health Foundation

- *A sense of belonging at school helps children feel supported, respected and accepted, which is good for their mental health.*
- *Children who feel they belong are more engaged in schoolwork, perform better academically and are less likely to experience loneliness, anxiety and depression.*
- *Teachers can foster belonging by connecting individually with students, encouraging classroom connections and empowering students.*
- *Parents and caregivers can support school belonging by taking an interest in their child's school life and checking in regularly with the child about school.*

The reality is that we do not need expensive programming or training to help our children to feel that they *belong*. The article below includes five very simple steps to promote a greater sense of belonging in our students.

Five Simple Ways to Say "You Belong"

By Dominique Smith, Douglas Fisher, Nancy Frey
in Educational Leadership

Make belonging part of your classroom's DNA with these no-cost practices.



Credit: Maskot Images / Shutterstock

In her 2022 TEDx Talk, biotechnologist Lola Adeyemo argues, "You don't have to be an immigrant, a woman, a Black person, or any other dimensions that society calls diversity to seek belonging. As humans we *all* seek belonging." As she notes, belonging is not simply fitting in. Psychologist Geoffrey Cohen echoes this idea, writing, "Belonging is the feeling that we're part of a larger group that values, respects, and cares for us—and to which we feel we have something to contribute" (Cohen, 2022).

The fact is, a sense of belonging is a condition of performance at any age, in any profession, and in any sphere of education. **Students with a strong sense of belonging perform better academically** (Cai et al., 2022). When students don't feel they belong, they question their status and membership in the group, which undermines their ability to learn. This also compromises the effectiveness of instruction, however excellent it may be.

When students feel a sense of belonging, they experience measurable health benefits, too, such as improved self-reported wellness and fewer doctor visits (Walton & Cohen, 2011). Emotionally and physically healthy students are better equipped to excel academically. Belonging, therefore, is not a peripheral concern—it's fundamental to learning.

Let's look at **five actions teachers can take to build students' sense of belonging**. Solid evidence backs their effectiveness, and **they don't cost a thing**. They're not groundbreaking and they're not new, but they *are* easy to implement—and sometimes, in the rush of the day, they're just as easy to forget.

Belonging Builder 1: Greet Students at the Door

Research indicates that when teachers **personally greet students before class**, students engage more quickly in academic tasks and exhibit higher levels of on-task behavior compared to when such greetings are absent (Allday et al., 2011). In a study of 10 middle school classrooms, **engagement increased by 20 percent** and problematic behavior decreased by 9 percent when teachers started class by welcoming students at the door (Cook et al., 2018).

The intervention is simple. When greeting students at your door:

- Say the student's name.
- Make eye contact and match it with a friendly facial expression.
- Use a friendly nonverbal greeting, such as a handshake, high-five, fist-bump, wave, or thumbs-up.
- Give a few words of encouragement, like "Glad you're here." Or "Let's make it count today."

A few years ago, coauthor Doug was working with a high school math teacher whose students were not only disengaged, but frequently disruptive. As one of the students put it, "We're not connecting here." The teacher reluctantly agreed to start greeting students at the door and noted a change within weeks. When one of the students said to the class, "Hey, let's focus! We're all a team here, and she's trying really hard," she knew the approach had worked. Not only did student engagement improve, but the teacher's job satisfaction soared.

Belonging Builder 2: Create Meaningful Classroom Responsibilities

A sense of being needed nurtures belonging, a truth that holds for young people as much as it does for adults. One effective way to cultivate this in the classroom is by assigning student jobs that carry real responsibility. This not only fosters a sense of ownership but also strengthens classroom management, enhances student engagement, and builds a strong sense of community.

Meaningful classroom roles help establish relational trust because students recognize that their teachers believe in their capabilities (Demerath et al., 2022), so they're more likely to take academic risks and engage deeply. And relational trust between students and teachers is an accelerator of learning (Sun, Zhang, & Forsyth, 2023). Further, when students take on responsibilities related to classroom routines, teachers have more time to focus on fostering a cohesive learning environment. Classroom cohesion—in which teachers and students collaborate toward shared learning goals—has a profound effect on student success.

Teachers can assign a variety of classroom roles that empower students, such as discussion facilitator, research assistant, wellness ambassador, and new student liaison. Operational and logistical roles are important, too. A technology support specialist, timekeeper, and data tracker can be vital in a smooth-running classroom. In one study, a middle school teacher who implemented structured classroom responsibilities found qualitative evidence that these roles positively influenced both the classroom environment and students' sense of belonging (Avis, 2017). By integrating such responsibilities, educators create a culture where students feel trusted and connected—key ingredients for academic and personal growth.

These strategies are easy to implement
—but sometimes in the rush of the day,
they're just as easy to forget.

Belonging Builder 3: Use Universal Response Opportunities

As Cohen (2022) noted, belonging includes feeling valued and contributing to the group. But in some classrooms, the only students who contribute are those who volunteer. The teacher calls on students who indicate they're ready to share, which results in a small subset of the classroom providing the majority of responses. This can negatively affect those who don't choose to speak up.

To address this issue, some teachers call on students at random, buoyed by evidence that this approach can hold students accountable for their engagement (Knight, Wise, & Sieke, 2016). However, additional evidence shows that some students fear being called on at random and can experience shame and humiliation if they're not prepared to answer (Cooper, Downing, & Brownell, 2018). Those feelings don't build a sense of belonging. Meanwhile, students who desperately want

to share but feel they have limited opportunities to do so can begin to disengage and come to believe their contributions are not valued.

Thus, wise educators balance the ways in which they ask students to respond. In addition to calling on volunteers and using randomized responses, they might **add universal response opportunities, giving all students a safe opportunity to respond at the same time.** In a 2023 meta-analysis of 29 studies on using response cards—those reusable cards or signs on which students display their responses to a question or prompt—findings show "increases in test and quiz achievement and levels of participation and decreases in off-task behavior" (Marsh et al., 2023).

Teachers can use any number of universal response techniques, including:

- Personal dry-erase boards
- Hand signals
- Index cards with responses prepopulated on them
- Technology tools such as Kahoot or Canva
- Polls

Coauthor Dominique spoke with a group of elementary students about their experiences with class participation and noticed a striking contrast in their responses. Some students shared that they often felt invisible in class because they weren't expected to respond to teacher questions. Others, however, expressed that their contributions truly mattered. As one student explained, "Our teacher really wants to know what we think. Everyone is important, and she waits to make sure we all have an answer. Then she helps us if we need it."

> Students are not likely to take an academic risk,
> much less experience a strong sense of belonging,
> if their failure-to-success ratio tips to failure.

Belonging Builder 4: Boost Productive Group Work

We have emphasized in our work that students need opportunities during lessons to interact with peers using academic language (Fisher & Frey, 2021). This enables students to consolidate their understanding, hear the thinking of their peers, and deepen their learning.

However, too often there is no accountability for collaborative learning. One student may do all the work for the group, or students might work independently, doing the best they can on their own, and then combine their individual efforts at the end to submit a final product to the teacher.

We see collaborative learning as comprising two different categories of instructional moves: group work and productive group work. In group work, teachers can implement think-pair-share; carousel, which gets everyone moving around the room to engage with various topics; and numbered heads together, in which students who have "numbered off" put their heads together to answer a question, with any one of the students likely to be called on to deliver and explain that answer. Although group work enables students to interact, it requires teachers to actively monitor student participation and responses; they recognize that they may never know what each student actually contributed to the conversation.

Productive group work, on the other hand, may involve jigsaw (in which groups of students are asked to become experts on different aspects of a topic and then share what they have learned); collaborative posters; and book clubs. **Productive group work *does* involve individual accountability**, and teachers should use it when they want to deepen students' understanding through argumentation.

Consider a collaborative poster. Each student in a group is given a different color marker, and they contribute to the poster in their assigned color. Teachers can immediately see individual student contributions, providing insight into the instructional next steps needed to advance learning. During productive group work, the teacher can meet with small groups of students or take care of other tasks because accountability is built into the task itself.

When teachers successfully structure productive group work, students feel heard and know that their peers need their contribution for the group to be successful. They learn self-regulation and self-efficacy as they collaborate with others in

the give-and-take of productive group work. Students also report a stronger sense of belonging in school when they have opportunities to collaborate because it fosters connection, shared experiences, and a sense of community (Webb, Farivar, & Mastergeorge, 2002).

Belonging Builder 5: Harness the Power of Past Success

When students have a strong sense of belonging, they're much more likely to engage in academic risk-taking, which includes the willingness to ask questions, offer ideas, and complete complex tasks. And when students engage in academic risk-taking, they learn more.

But students are not likely to take an academic risk, much less experience a strong sense of belonging, if their failure-to-success ratio tips to failure. When it does, they come to expect failure, at least within that group or classroom, and they participate less frequently in group activities. When their failure-to-success ratio tips to success, however, students come to expect success and see failures as temporary setbacks. They experience a much stronger bond with others in the group, and they recognize the value of their contributions, which reinforces their sense of belonging.

To attend to individual students' success-to-failure ratios, teachers can chunk tasks and assignments to increase the ratio in favor of success. We're not suggesting that you lower the level of expectation or reduce rigor, but rather that you intentionally plan for students to experience success more frequently than failure. One simple method for increasing students' success experiences has demonstrated positive outcomes.

Researchers studied 3rd and 6th grade students engaged in challenging math tasks (Finn, Miele, & Wigfield, 2025). In some cases, students were given 10 difficult math problems to work on; in other cases, in addition to the 10 difficult math problems, students were given five related but only moderately difficult math problems that they had already completed successfully. The researchers found that reminding students of their earlier success had a positive effect on students' persistence and performance. If teachers apply this concept more widely, reminding students that they have been successful in the past, they prime their students for success today.

Just Commit to It

Fostering a sense of belonging in the classroom is not just an abstract ideal. It's a powerful, research-backed strategy that directly affects student engagement, well-being, and academic success. By making belonging a priority, we not only enhance learning but also nurture the confidence and resilience that students carry far beyond the classroom.

These five no-cost interventions are simple, yet transformative practices. They make a lasting difference—so let's commit to them every day.

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Marlborough Elementary School - Better Together For Children

Our mission is to educate, challenge and inspire each individual to excel and become a contributing member of society.

BEST YEAR EVER

Coffee & Chat

Join the Superintendent for a cup of coffee and conversation at the Central Office at MES from 8:30 – 10:00 AM.

Tuesday, November 3
Tuesday, December 8
Monday, December 21
Reach out to set up your own time!



No taxpayer dollars used for coffee or supplies!

If you have questions, come in for coffee at your convenience with the Superintendent of Schools.
E-mail Paul Smith at psmith@marlborough.k12.ct.us or call (860)295-6236.

Family Resources State of Connecticut	Mental Health Resources	Emergencies	MES School Calendar 2026-27	Important Annual Notices from MES
		GET HELP 24/7 Call **2-1-1** in CT 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: **988** Crisis Text Line: **741741**		

Reminder to families: Breakfast is available and FREE to all MES Students this year.

Attendance Matters
Every student. Every day.

Total Number of Days Absent	Acceptable Reasons for a Student Absence to be Considered Excused	Documentation Required within 10 Days
1-9	Any reason that the student's parent or guardian approves.	Parent or guardian note or email to the appropriate school email address.
10 and above	• Student illness • Religious holiday • Funeral • Mandated court appearance • Extraordinary educational opportunity pre-approved by the Superintendent of Schools. Contact the school for further information.	Parent or guardian note or email to the appropriate school email address and additional documentation as required and outlined in the Board of Education's Attendance Policy #5113.

Build the habit of good attendance.

View Marlborough Board of Education Policy 5113 - Attendance

Nondiscrimination Statement of the Marlborough Public Schools:
The Marlborough Public Schools does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, national/ethnic origin, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, status as a victim of domestic violence, Veteran status, disability in its programs, activities, and employment practices, status as a victim of sexual assault, or status as a victim of trafficking in persons. Equal access is provided to Scouting America and other designated youth groups.