

Washington SEL Professional Learning Network Peer-to-Peer Virtual Exchange: Exploring the Roles of Belonging and Social-Emotional Learning in Creating Inclusive Learning Environments for Students With Disabilities

Session Summary

The [Washington SEL Professional Learning Network](#) provides Washington state education professionals with social emotional learning (SEL)–related learning opportunities to support local educational agencies (LEAs) around the state in building the conditions, supports, and community partnerships that allow students to develop and apply social emotional skills. This Peer-to-Peer Virtual Exchange brought individuals from eight LEAs and OSPI staff together to identify the importance of creating inclusive learning environments for students with disabilities. Cassie Martin, OSPI executive director of education, and Kylie Massie, OSPI elementary school counseling program supervisor, were present as subject matter experts. During the session, participants met in small groups to brainstorm strategies for creating inclusive learning environments using [the PROGRESS Center’s 10 dimensions of belonging](#)¹ and SEL. Next, participants from LEAs began building an action plan, coming back together as a whole group at the end to share their next steps. The session ended with participants sharing reflections on the importance of fostering a sense of belonging for all students.

Participants shared several examples of how they are currently creating inclusive learning environments for students with disabilities using the 10 dimensions of belonging. When describing how they currently support the dimensions, participants noted that they are thinking about how to ensure that (a) students with disabilities can access SEL materials, (b) their teachers

¹ PROGRESS Center at the American Institutes for Research. (2022). *Reflecting on our practice: Ten ways schools can foster belonging among students with and without disabilities.*

https://promotingprogress.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/Fostering_Belonging_Handout.pdf.



are accepting and supportive, and (c) SEL is embedded throughout their schools. Next, participants reported that there are areas for improvement such as addressing the need for adult SEL, providing equitable access for all students, and building a shared vision and plan with parents, students, and the leadership team. Last, participants outlined which SEL elements support the dimensions, such as building social awareness skills, developing welcoming spaces for adults and their communities, and supporting teachers.

LEA participants suggested the following next steps for spurring change and strengthening dimensions of belonging for students with disabilities:

- Fill in gaps in understanding of SEL and build on current strengths, such as peer modeling.
- Review SEL curriculum data.
- Consider how to foster belonging for staff.
- Focus on rebuilding adult relationships.
- Build a shared vision and plan among the leadership team and promote family engagement.

Applying the 10 Dimensions of Belonging

The 10 dimensions of belonging are a powerful framework for reflecting on and fostering belonging within our schools and classrooms. The dimensions were developed by Dr. Erik Carter, a Cornelius Vanderbilt professor of special education at Vanderbilt University and co-director of the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities.

To build on the learnings from this virtual exchange, LEA teams may consider using the 10 dimensions of belonging to explore how to foster belonging across learning environments. For each dimension, ask the following questions:

- What are we doing really well right now?
- What could we be doing better or differently?
- What adult and student social emotional skills relate to this dimension?
- What practices and policies can be put in place to support the development of those social emotional skills and belonging dimension?
- What is our next step to spur change?



Following is a list of the PROGRESS Center’s practitioner-friendly resources to support additional learning and action planning around the 10 dimensions of belonging.

Resource	Author	Summary
<u>Ten Ways Schools Can Foster Belonging Among Students With and Without Disabilities</u>	PROGRESS Center, Dr. Erik Carter	This webinar shares a framework for reflecting upon and fostering belonging within schools and classrooms. It includes a handout that reviews the 10 dimensions of belonging and provides reflection questions.
<u>Stories From the Classroom: Finding Belonging</u>	PROGRESS Center	In this video, Xuan Truong reflects upon how difficult school was for her as a student with a disability. She felt isolated and as if she were on the outside looking at a world that seemed inaccessible to her, until someone included her in a significant and meaningful way. Having key figures in her life to point out that she was capable made all the difference.
<u>Creating Communities of Belonging for Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities</u>	PROGRESS Center, TIES Center, Dr. Erik Carter, Elizabeth Biggs	This resource from the TIES Center was developed by Erik Carter and Elizabeth Biggs to highlight how schools can create a place of belonging for every student. As defined in the guide, belonging is experienced when students are present, invited, welcomed, known, accepted, involved, supported, heard, befriended, and needed. This resource defines these 10 dimensions of belonging, and it provides examples, tips, and reflection questions for each of the 10 dimensions. It includes a tool to support educators and schools to reflect on the dimensions to ensure they are developing a sense of belonging for all students, including students with significant cognitive disabilities.



Following is a list of resources that can support additional learning and action planning around SEL and creating inclusive learning environments.

Resource	Author	Summary
Washington SEL Standards, Benchmarks, & Indicators	OSPI	This document provides a scaffolded framework identifying observable developmental benchmarks and indicators. Educators benefit from clear definitions of skills and dispositions articulating how learners develop. This resource is available in Spanish and Chinese .
Inclusionary Practices Professional Development Project	OSPI	The Inclusionary Practices Professional Development Project provides educators with professional development opportunities and resources in support of inclusionary practices across the state.
Belonging Through a Culture of Dignity: The Keys to Successful Equity Implementation	Floyd Cobb and John Krownapple	In <i>Belonging Through a Culture of Dignity</i> , Cobb and Krownapple argue that schools struggle to implement equitable change in public education. Additionally, they argue that the cause of these struggles is based largely on the failure of educators to consider the foundational elements on which educational equity is based: belonging and dignity. The authors make these concepts accessible and explain their importance in the implementation of educational equity initiatives.
Washington SEL Module Segment 3: Creating a Professional Culture Based on SEL	OSPI	The segment provides strategies to create a professional culture in which culturally responsive SEL is a key ingredient (e.g., implementing an SEL practice at staff meetings, hosting professional learning communities on SEL, and providing coaching and feedback on SEL).
The Power of Peers: Introduction to the Peer Engagement Implementation Guides	TIES Center	This resource provides guidance on promoting peer relationships. The TIES Center invited leading experts to share their expertise on implementing nine educational interventions to promote meaningful engagement and relationships among students with and without disabilities. They created short, practical implementation guides based on their extensive experience working with local schools.



Resource	Author	Summary
Finding Belonging: A Discussion Guide	PROGRESS Center	<p>This video and discussion guide can be used to facilitate staff discussions about fostering belonging and the important role of relationships. The discussion guide includes information to support facilitating the discussion, reaction questions that will support teams in reflecting and sharing their perspectives, application questions designed to build understanding and action, and additional resources to support further focus on this topic.</p>

