

Promoting Sense of Belonging

Role of Superintendent and School Committees

Shai Fuxman & Tori Todd
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Professional Development



Consultation



Ongoing MTSS Support

Agenda



- Sense of Belonging
- Identity
- Relationships
- Role of School Committees and Superintendents

Reflection & Dialogue

- 1 Think of an educator who had a particularly positive impact on you.
- 2 What about this educator made an impact on you?

“Teaching seems to require the sort of skills one would need to pilot a bus full of live chickens backwards, with no brakes, down a rocky road through the Andes while providing colorful and informative commentary on the scenery.”

–Franklin Habit

Why Does Belonging Matter?

Ask the Expert

**Deleon Gray, associate professor
of educational psychology
and equity**



What is Belonging?

Sense of belonging is defined as the extent to which **individuals feel that they are valued members of their school's community.**

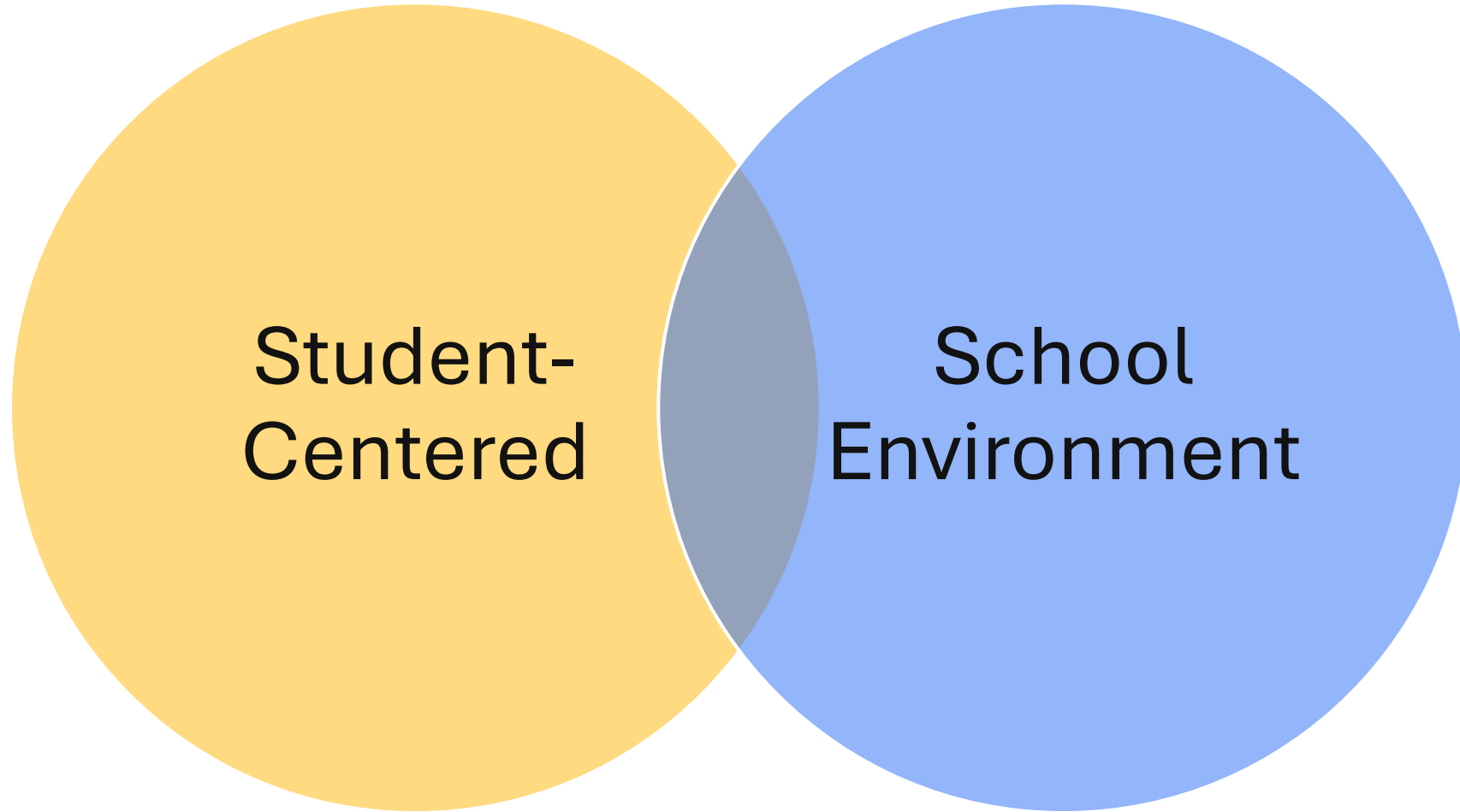
Belonging can include feelings of **understanding, respect, connectedness, membership, or mattering.**

(Walton & Cohen, 2011)

Sense of Belonging is associated with:

- +** Student confidence and motivation
- +** Positive culture and climate
- +** Academic engagement and achievement
- +** Teacher retention
- +** Long-term success

Two Ways to Foster Belonging



Two Ways to Foster Belonging

Student-Centered

Individuals are identified and provided with interventions/supports to help them connect to the school community through:

- Instruction in social-emotional skills (relationship skills, collaboration skills, etc.)
- Relationship-building opportunities (mentorships, peer groups, check-ins, lunch buddies)
- Activities aligned with their interests (clubs, classes, afterschool programs, internships)

Two Ways to Foster Belonging

School Environment

Schools adapt culture and way of operating to reflect the identities, needs, and preferences of their community members:

- Culture and norms are co-created by adults and students
- Ever-changing as new students come in and classes graduate
- Programs are created, changed, or sunsetted to adapt to the community

Identity and Relationships



Identity

- Do I know who I am, and have opportunities to explore different parts of my identity?
- Do the multiple facets of my identity feel safe, supported and celebrated in this environment?
- Are the norms, expectations, culture, and practices of the school accepting and supportive of my identity?

Relationships

- Are there other individuals with whom I connect in a positive way?
- How do I influence other members of my learning community (i.e., peers, students, staff, administrators) and how do they influence me?
- Are there opportunities to share expertise, learn from others, and explore common interests?
- Are social skills and problem-solving skills taught and practiced?

Identity and Belonging

LETTING STUDENTS LEAD WITH THEIR IDENTITY

WITH KAREN PITTMAN



Making School Identity-Safe

Learning environments that are Identity-Safe create a sense of belonging for students by:

- Eliminating psychological threats to students' identities
- Promoting student voice
- Cultivating diversity as a resource for teaching
- Proactively teaching and practicing social skills to help students respect and care for one another in an emotionally/physically safe classroom



Strategies to Support Identity and Belonging

Classroom Strategies to Support Identity and Belonging:

- Identity maps
- Self-portraits
- Autobiographies
- “I am” poems
- Co-created norms, routines, and expectations

Systemic Strategies to Support Identity and Belonging:

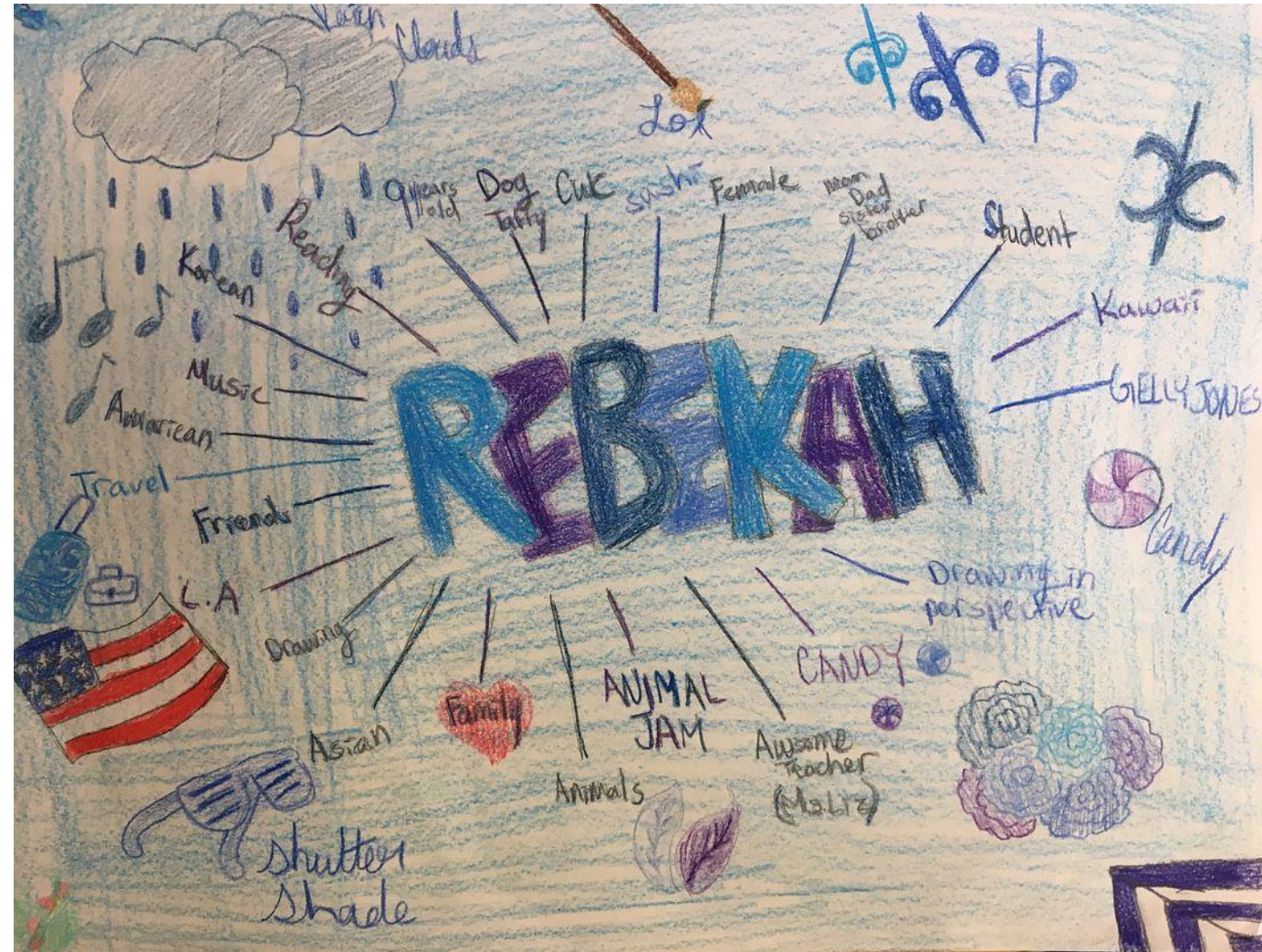
- Restorative practices
- Affinity groups
- Mentorships
- Student-driven organizations or initiatives



Example: Identity Map

Possible Reflection Questions:

1. What makes you unique?
2. How would you describe yourself to others?
3. What aspects of your life (hobbies, interests, family, food, etc.) are most important to you?



Turn and Talk

In what ways do your educators:

- Help students explore their identity?
- Encourage your students to express themselves and their identity in the classroom and/or in school?



Relationships



ALL OF US WILL LEARN.

Benefits of Positive Relationships:

- Promotes social and emotional skills such as empathy, cooperation, and problem-solving skills (Pepler & Bierman, 2018)
- Decrease risk of negative behaviors such as bullying and exclusion (Pepler & Bierman, 2018)
- Promote academic achievement via learning motivation and learning engagement. (Shao et al, 2024)
- Improve students' mental health. (Long, 2021)
- Increases school connectedness and school liking. (Tepordei et a, 2023)



Strategies to Support Relationships & Belonging

Classroom Strategies to Support Relationships and Belonging:

- Peer interviews
- Collaborative table groups
- Teaching and practicing social skills

Systemic Strategies to Support Relationships and Belonging:

- Relationship mapping
- Peer Mentorship/Buddies (students and/or staff)
- “Friday chats”



Turn and Talk

In what ways do your educators:

- Develop meaningful relationships with students?
- Help students develop meaningful relationships with each other?



The Role of School Committees & Superintendents

Vision and Goals

Does your strategic plan/district goals clearly articulate a definition of and commitment to **Belonging**?

Are there explicit action steps, guidance, and accountability for admin to put in place strategies that promote **Belonging**?

Policies

Do your policies promote **Belonging**?
(e.g., policies protect students to express their identity?)

Have your policies been audited with a **Belong/Equity** in mind?

Professional Development

Are your administrators and teachers trained in effective **Belonging** strategies?

What type of professional development/support do you provide to administrators and teachers related to **Belonging**?

Data

What does your data say about **Belonging**? Who feels **Belonging** and who doesn't?

What type of **Belonging** data are you collecting and how is it used and reported?

Closing

One step you will take coming out of today's session?



Thank you

Presented by:

Shai Fuxman, sfuxman@edc.org

Tori Todd, ttodd@edc.org

For more information, check out solutions.edc.org



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