

33rd Annual Learning Symposium

Breakout Session:

School Belonging in the Middle Grades

Presented by Heidi Johnson, M.Ed., WSSA School Counselor



Participants will learn about and have the opportunity to engage in discussion on the importance of school belonging in the middle grades and the impact that can have on academic, social, and emotional development.

Presentation Objectives/Learning Outcomes:

- Develop an understanding of the important social-emotional developmental milestones for middle school aged children.
- Define the concept of belonging and its importance.
- Relate the concept of belonging to the social-emotional development of middle school age children and understand the significance this plays in healthy development.

Bio of presenter:

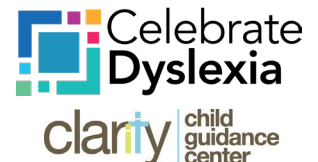
Ms Heidi Johnson graduated from Siena College in Loudonville, NY, and the University of Maryland, College Park where she earned a Master's in Education in School Counseling. She has had the opportunity to live and work in a number of different states including Maryland, Georgia, Tennessee, New York, and Texas. She recently was awarded the CREST from the Texas Counseling Association which recognizes model school counseling programs from across the state. She is thrilled to have joined the Winston School San Antonio staff as their School Counselor.



Thanks to our Sponsors and Partners:



CAPTRUST



Dianne P. Hengst, M.a., PsyD.



TRINITY UNIVERSITY

School Belonging and the Middle Grades

Fostering a Positive Environment
for Student Success

Heidi Johnson, MEd

 *School Counselor*

Winston School San

1

Today we will
discuss

- Definition of Belonging
- School Belonging and its importance in the middle grades
- Components of School Belonging
- Physical, social-emotional and intellectual changes in middle years
- Benefits of School Belonging
- Strategies for fostering School Belonging

2

School Belonging in the Middle Grades
Presented by Heidi Johnson, M.Ed., WSSA School Counselor

What is Belonging?
and how does it make you feel?



[Back to Agenda Page](#)

3

Belonging

4

School Belonging in the Middle Grades
Presented by Heidi Johnson, M.Ed., WSSA School Counselor



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K9tA_7_XavQ

5

[Back to Agenda Page](#)

*As Human Beings
one of the most
essential needs we have
is to belong*



Discuss with your table mates

6

Why is Belonging Important?



Social Connection

Emotional Well Being

Identity and Self Worth

Shared Values and Beliefs

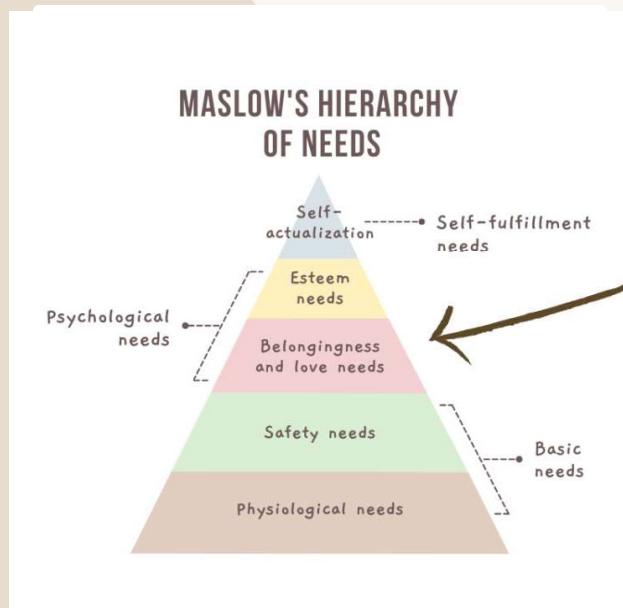
Reduced Stress & Anxiety

Motivation & Productivity

Physical Health

7

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



[Back to Agenda Page](#)

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is a theory of psychology explaining human motivation based on the pursuit of different levels of needs. The theory states that humans are motivated to fulfill their needs in a hierarchical order. This order begins with the most basic needs before moving on to more advanced needs. BELONGING is a human NEED.

8

School Belonging in the Middle Grades
Presented by Heidi Johnson, M.Ed., WSSA School Counselor

If we have no peace, it
is because we have
forgotten that we
belong to each other.

[Mother Teresa](#)

A deep sense of love and belonging is an irreducible need of all people. We are biologically, cognitively, physically, and spiritually wired to love, to be loved, and to belong. Brene Brown

There are places you haven't been where you already belong.

By building relations we create a source of love and personal pride and belonging that makes living in a chaotic world easier.

[Susan Lieberman](#)

9



Belonging

If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other.

[Mother Teresa](#)

A deep sense of love and belonging is an irreducible need of all people. We are biologically, cognitively, physically, and spiritually wired to love, to be loved, and to belong. Brene Brown

There are places you haven't been where you already belong.

By building relations we create a source of love and personal pride and belonging that makes living in a chaotic world easier.

Susan Lieberman

10

School Belonging in the Middle Grades
Presented by Heidi Johnson, M.Ed., WSSA School Counselor

Belonging

- Belonging is the feeling of security and support when there is a sense of acceptance, inclusion, and identity for a member of a certain group.

School Belonging

- The extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included and supported by others in the school environment (Allen & Kern 2017)

[Back to Agenda Page](#)

11



12

The middle school
years
(ages 11-13)
is a time of major
change



Physical

**Social
Emotional**

Intellectual

13

Physical Changes



[Back to Agenda Page](#)

Decreased coordination as height & weight
changes rapidly

Uneven development in agility, balance,
flexibility and strength

Puberty begins

14



Social Emotional changes

Identity Formation

Importance of peer relationships

Mood swings & emotional sensitivity

Increased parent-child conflict

Interest in romantic relationships

15

Intellectual

- Increase in abstract thinking
- Improvement in critical thinking
- Better problem solving skills
- Expanded vocabulary & language skills
- Interest in specialized subjects/hobbies
- Increased memory & learning capacity



16



Components of School Belonging

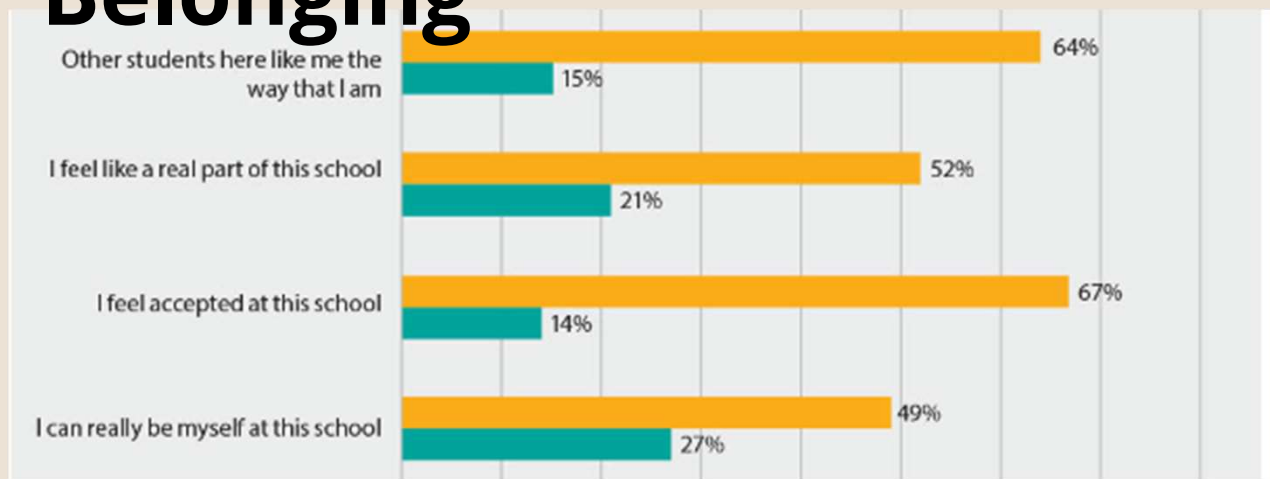
School Environment	Safety	Relationships	Teaching
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Extracurricular activities• Celebrating diversity & differences• Community connections• Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Physical Safety• Emotional Safety• Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teacher to student• Peer to peer• Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Direct Instruction• Expectations• Differentiation• Support Strategies• Barriers

Dr. Sarah Wendland

17

Middle School Belonging

National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2020



18

Fostering Belonging



19



School Environment



Availability and access to a wide range of extra curricular activities (sports, arts)



School wide acceptance and respect for individuals & their differences & the opportunity to learn about & celebrate those (Multicultural night)



Volunteer opportunities within the community for students




Community involvement within the school (Mentoring, Tutoring)

20

School Belonging in the Middle Grades
Presented by Heidi Johnson, M.Ed., WSSA School Counselor

Having anti-bullying & anti-harrassment policies in place and implementing those consistently	Ensuring physical space is safe, well lit, uncluttered
Clearly displaying all fire safety & evacuation maps	Holding regular safety drills with time for feedback and discussion
Supervising students during passing periods, lunches, recess	Locking all door ways & entry ways during the school day

School Safety



21

<h1>Relationships</h1>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Having a consistent and reliable form of communication with students & parents• Greeting each student everyday• Regularly and consistently using students names when talking to them• Getting to know your students likes and interests• Conducting Morning Meetings where you come together as a classroom community• Giving the opportunity for group projects and peer interaction
------------------------	--

22

Teaching

Checking for understanding frequently

Differentiating instruction by teaching to all ability levels

Encouraging students to self-advocate

Welcoming student input and questions

Using multi-modal approaches



23

Challenges & Barriers

Talk at your table



24

Challenges & Barriers

Bullying & Harassment
Not having adequate resources
Unsafe building/environment
Socioeconomic/cultural differences that
are divisive rather than celebrated
Lack of inclusivity
Poor communication
Too many systemic changes/transitions
Lack of parental and community
involvement
Time constraints



25

The Benefits of School Belonging

- Increased student achievement & graduation rates
- Decreased discipline referrals
 - Better social skills
 - Reduced at-risk behaviors
- Better overall mental health & well being



26

Questions,
Thoughts,
Comments.....

27



28

Resources

