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# 5 Strategies to Build Student Belonging

## [With Templates]

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# About This Resource

When things are uncertain, we all want a safe place to land—a place where we feel we can be ourselves and be accepted. As an education leader, **you have the power to create the type of place where students feel they belong.**

**When a student feels a sense of belonging at school, they thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.** Research suggests that students with a high sense of belonging are happier, healthier, and more engaged learners, and also have better academic outcomes.

What do we mean by "sense of belonging"? At Panorama, our research team defines belonging as **"the extent to which students feel that they are valued members of their school's community."** We also recognize that you may have a different definition. We encourage you to talk with fellow educators, families, and students in your district to define what belonging means for your community.

A student's sense of belonging can come from connections with both peers and adults. This guide includes **five strategies** for building strong relationships with students and creating a positive school culture where everyone feels they belong.

This resource is perfect for:

- **District Leaders:** Share these resources with your school teams and consider ways to improve sense of belonging districtwide.
- **School Leaders:** Bring these strategies to PLCs, staff meetings, or Student Support team meetings to share with staff and foster a sense of belonging in your school community.
- **Classroom Teachers and Support Staff:** Try these activities with your students during morning meetings, advisory, or homeroom to strengthen relationships and build positive classroom culture.

If your school or district uses Panorama's survey tools to measure Sense of Belonging, try out these strategies to take action on your student voice data and improve belonging!

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# 1. Permission to Envision

**Overview:** In this activity for educators, take time to think intentionally about your goals for student belonging and what actions you may take to realize those goals in your classroom, school, or district. Give yourself permission to take a step back and envision what you hope to be true for your educational community.

**Instructions:**

1. Make a copy of this template to draft your community headline.

2. Imagine you are three years in the future. You pull up the news site for your community. What does the headline say?

3. Today, you get to write the headline for your community. What would you like to be true?

4. How would students' lives be different if this headline came true? What actions can you take to make this headline come true?

5. Share your headline with team members or families, and use the headline as an aspiration for your classroom, school, or district.

**Example:**

## Drafting Your Community Headline

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### The Charlotte Post

**February 27, 2023**

*Strong Readers Strong Leaders: 90%+ of CMS Students Graduate Feeling Supported, Connected and Confident*

# 2. "Get To Know You" User Guides

**Overview:** Students and adults complete user guides and share them with their classroom (always to the extent they feel comfortable). A "user guide" is a document that can help individuals provide more visibility into their personalities, interests, and working habits, and facilitate more effective collaboration with peers and teachers.

**Instructions:**

1. Consider the following before you create your user guides:

   - When could students complete and share their user guides? You could ask students to complete these at home, or during a quiet work period during the day, depending on your schedule.
   - What sharing formats would facilitate peer to peer and student to teacher connections? Would small groups or pairs work well, or could you share them online through a document-sharing platform?
   - Who else in your school community would benefit from completing user guides?

2. Creating a guide requires self-reflection and transparency. Remind students and adults that they only need to share what they are comfortable sharing.

3. When creating your user guides, you can use this template for students, or whatever format and questions feel appropriate for your group. Here are some ideas to get you started:

   - What makes you feel inspired?
   - What is one thing you think you do well as a student/educator?
   - What is one thing you would like to do better as a student/educator?
   - What do you like to do outside of school?
   - What is your favorite part of the school day?

For more ideas, check out 101 Inclusive Get-to-Know-You Questions.

# 3. Culture Boxes

**Overview:** Students and educators collect a set of artifacts that represent their culture and compile these objects into their own culture box. Creating culture boxes is an opportunity to build a sense of belonging, as well as self and social awareness.

**Activity Suggestions and Pre-Work:**
- Model your own culture box or invite caring adults to share their own artifacts.
- Before inviting students to create and share their own culture boxes, agree on a set of collective community agreements with your students in order to create a safe space for sharing.
- Draft and modify inquiry-based stems to help students respectfully engage with each others' boxes. Examples include:

  Can you tell me more about _____?
  Thank you for sharing about _____.
  I liked how you explained _____.

- This activity can be run across several weeks. Here is a sample sequence:
  [WEEK 1] Educator creates their own culture box
  [WEEK 2] Educator shares their culture box with students
  [WEEK 3] Assign students to create and share their own box
  [WEEK 4] Share projects with families

**Instructions:**
1. Ask each student to collect a set of artifacts that represent their culture and compile these objects into their own culture box.

2. Students can select a wide variety of items—from photographs, to letters, to family recipes, to favorite toys or other objects.

3. Once completed, students can share their culture box with classmates (and caregivers, too!) during a show-and-tell (virtual or in-person) in which they explain how the objects represent their culture and identity.

4. Optional: After students and adults have shared, make a collective classroom culture box.



**Learn how Ogden High School improved student belonging at school in response to Panorama student voice data.**
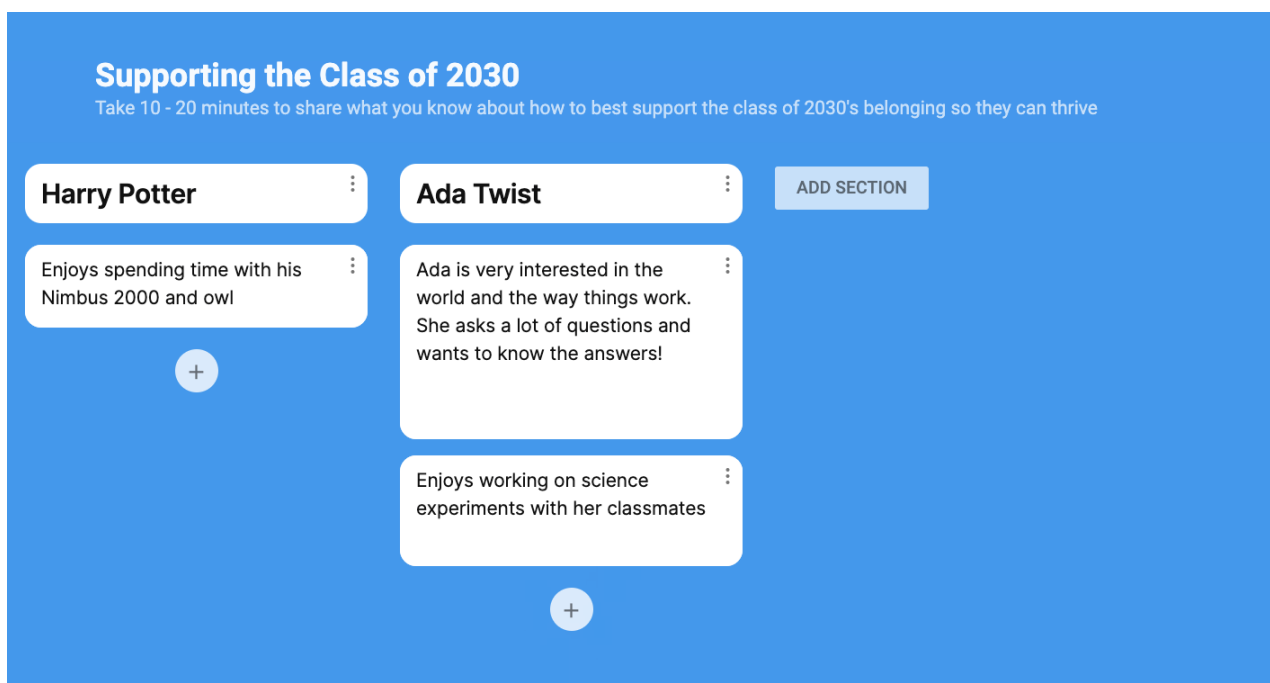
**Read More Here**

# 4. Belonging Baton Pass

**Overview:** Cultivating a true sense of belonging is akin to a baton pass. As you learn what works for students, their hobbies, and how they like to feel seen, share that with other adults who are supporting those students. Create simple, shareable information systems to capture belonging expertise amongst caring adults (classroom teachers, administrators, support staff, custodial staff, etc.) in your school community.

**Instructions:**
1. Create a shared document with team members. Examples include Padlet, a Google doc or spreadsheet, or Support Notes in the Panorama platform.

**Padlet Example:**

## Supporting the Class of 2030
Take 10 - 20 minutes to share what you know about how to best support the class of 2030's belonging so they can thrive

**Harry Potter**

Enjoys spending time with his Nimbus 2000 and owl

**Ada Twist**

Ada is very interested in the world and the way things work. She asks a lot of questions and wants to know the answers!

Enjoys working on science experiments with her classmates

ADD SECTION

2. Add to the document each time you learn something new about your student or team member. When writing notes, be mindful that what you're sharing is asset-based. What are the stories we're telling about our students? How are we making sure that we're sharing information that highlights students' strengths?

3. Share the document with other caring adults to create more connections between students and team members.

4. Take time and make space to share and discuss these learnings, perhaps at staff or grade-level meetings. Be sure to share these notes with the students' future educators at the beginning of the semester or school year.

# Pro Tip for Panorama Users:
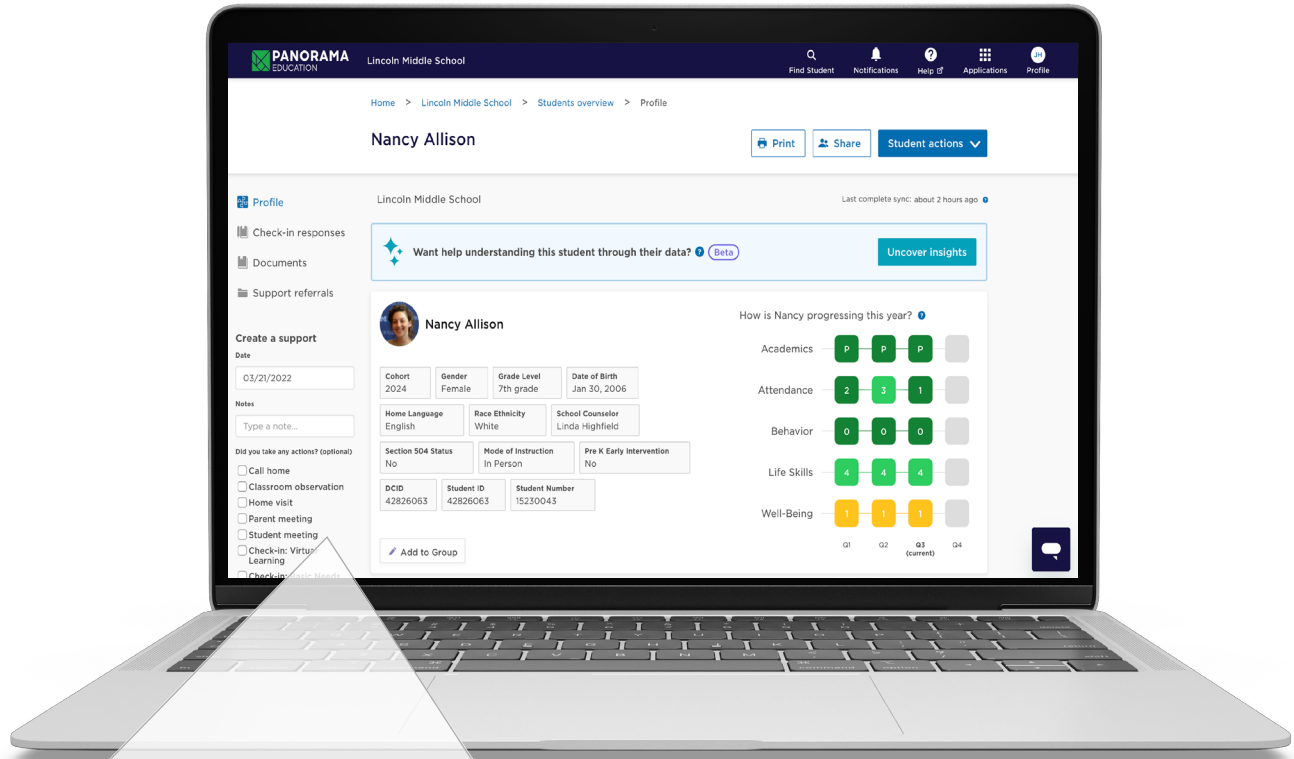


Notes are visible to all colleagues ❓

## Support notes ❓

Marissa W. 6/8/22

[ Call home ]

Called Anna's mom about great progress with self management today

Show less

**With Panorama Support Notes, you can add notes about a student directly to their profile in Panorama.**

**Note where students are indicating they need support, actions you've taken to help, and what you've learned for the future.**

**Support Notes are visible to other educators with access to Panorama.**

# 5. Morning Meetings

**Overview:** Morning meetings are a schoolwide classroom management practice used to address students' social-emotional learning needs on a daily basis. Setting aside time every day to check-in and say hello builds a sense of belonging for students and adults in the classroom.

**Instructions:**
Every morning, teachers gather their students in a circle (for 15 to 30 minutes) to interact with one another and kick-off the day. While these daily warm-ups will look different in different classrooms, the most widely used model of a morning meeting (developed by Responsive Classroom) includes four main elements:

1. **Greeting:** Students and teachers greet one another by name, oftentimes at the door as they enter the classroom

2. **Sharing:** Students share information about events in their personal lives. Use these Virtual Check-In Google forms for students and adults to send a "temperature check".

3. **Activity:** The class participates in a brief activity, like Rose, Bud, Thorn, that cultivates connection and provides opportunities to practice life skills or academic skills.

4. **Morning Message:** Students read a short message authored by their teacher to prime them for the work they'll engage in during the day.

# About Panorama Education

Panorama Education is an education technology company founded in 2012 that helps students achieve academic success and well-being, and gives schools and school districts a platform to hear what families, students and teachers need in the classroom. Educators use Panorama's software platform to understand and support students across academics, attendance, behavior, and life skills development. District leaders use the same platform to track progress toward strategic goals, such as literacy, graduation, and school safety. Panorama is proud that its platform is used to support 15 million students in 25,000 schools and 2,000 districts across the United States.
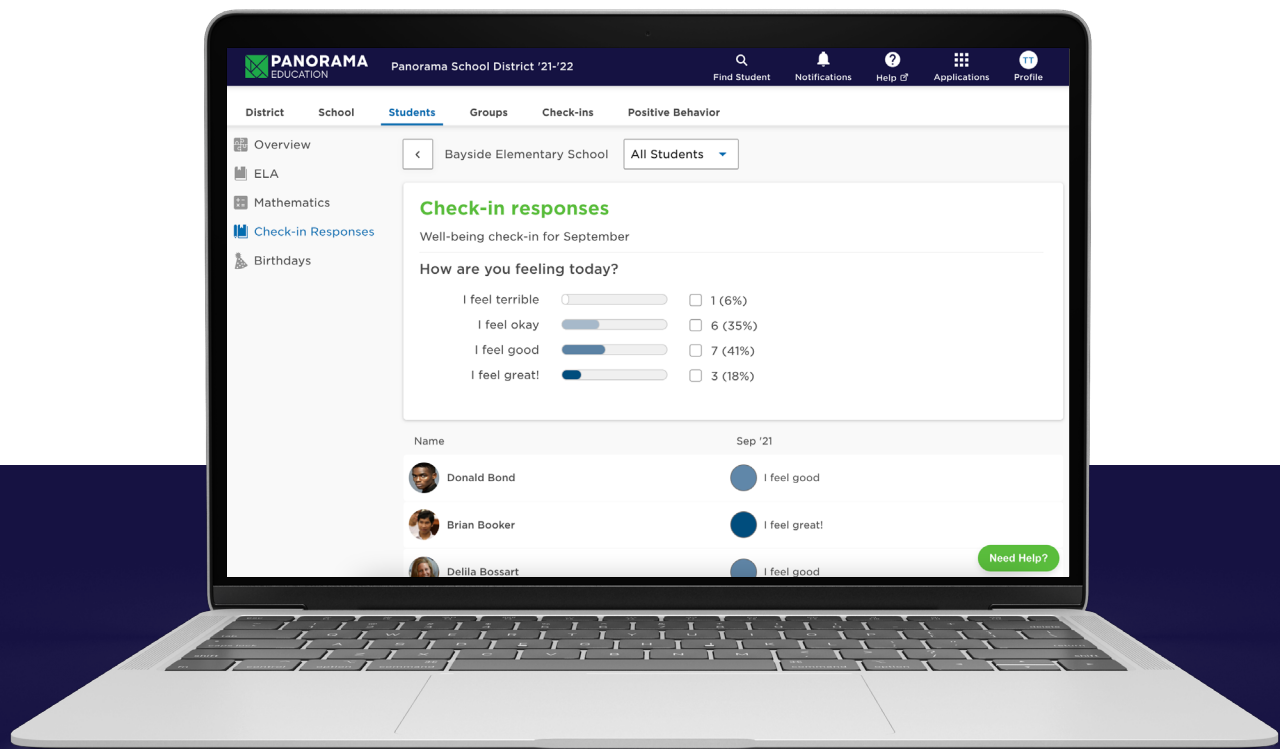
## Get in Touch:

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