



**BEST PRACTICES  
CLEARINGHOUSE**

- Lessons from the Field -

## Free to Learn Miniseries: Creating Welcoming School Environments

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*Wednesday, December 6, 2023 | 3:00 – 4:30 PM ET*  
*Transcript*

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**Cindy Carraway-Wilson:** Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to today's webinar, the first in our Free to Learn miniseries entitled, Creating Welcoming School Environments. In a few minutes, Ms. Katy Joseph from the Department of Education will talk to us more about the Free to Learn initiative. On behalf of the US Department of Education, we're pleased to have you with us today and in fact, we have just over a thousand people registered for this webinar, so we expect many more to be logging in shortly. The miniseries in this webinar are part of our lessons from the Field webinar series, which highlight the effective tools, techniques, and strategies employed by you, everyday practitioners.

To address the hot topics that are in the top of educators minds. You can access recorded webinars from the series on the web page that's now being shared in chat. We have a set of dynamic panelists today who are excited to share information, resources, and strategies to help you create these welcoming school environments to get young people in the door and to help them engage in school in a safe and supportive climate. Be sure to visit the Best Practices Clearinghouse webpage at [bestpractices.ed.gov](https://bestpractices.ed.gov) to get additional supports and resources on the topic of creating these safe and supportive school environments as they relate to the Free to Learn initiative.

Sharing strategies enables us to improve our work and create environments where all young people can learn. Please note that the Department of Education does not necessarily represent the policy or views that are represented in this webinar, nor is the department necessarily endorsing any kind of resources here, but they're being offered freely for your review. My name is Cindy Carraway-Wilson, and I'm a training specialist for the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments or NCSSLE. NCSSLE is funded by the Office of Safe and Supportive Schools within the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education.

To learn a bit more about NCSSE, this slide shows that our homepage on the right and some of our more popular resources for creating supportive environments and addressing school climate and conditions for learning, on the left. Please note that this webinar is being recorded and in fact, all the materials that you see today, including the resources shared by our speakers, will be posted on the event webpage with the archive recording of the webinar.

This webpage has already been posted to the speaker bios, which you can see once we put this link into the chat box for you. And we'll be posting these links throughout the webinar, so please keep your eyes on that chat. Now I'd like to quickly review the agenda for today. We're going to begin by having our welcome from the Department of Education, and then we're going to move into three context-setting speakers who will provide information to deepen our understanding of the trends, benefits and strategies to create welcoming schools that nurture connection and belonging.

Then we'll move into our panel discussion to talk about what those strategies look like in real school environments. After a brief closing, we're going to be moving into that live Q&A portion with all of our speakers, so please do remember to use the Q&A button to post your questions there. Now I'm excited to just quickly talk a little bit about the speakers that we have lined up for our context setting. You can see them listed here and I will be introducing them briefly as each person comes up to speak.

Also, that link for your bios is being posted in the chat again and it's shown on this slide so you can read more about them on the website. Before we move into the content, I'd like to welcome onto the stage Ms. Katy Joseph, the Acting Director for the Center of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships in the Office of the Secretary of Education at the United States Department of Education. Katy.

**Katy Joseph:**

Thank you so much. Took me a minute to find the unmute button there, but it's really a pleasure to be with everyone today. The NCSSE team is an incredible partner and it's such a pleasure to be with a group of experts, practitioners, and partners from across the country who are as invested in this work as we are. So it's my pleasure to say on behalf of the US Department of Education, welcome to our latest Lessons from the Field webinar and the first of our Free to Learn miniseries creating welcoming school environments.

Now, we come together today as our nation has been contending with a disturbing series of hate-motivated attacks, as well as rising cases of anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and anti-Arab bigotry following the October 7th Hamas attacks in Israel and the subsequent conflict. Since schools often reflect the health and challenges in our communities, the US Department of Education is committed to supporting the state's districts in schools in improving their ability to prevent hate-based threats and bullying, and to recover from hate-based violence and to enhancing their overall school safety and climate.

In September 2022, the United We Stand Summit was held at the White House to bring national attention to the need to counter the destructive effects of hate-fueled violence on our democracy and public safety. To mobilize diverse sectors as society and communities across the country to respond to these dangers. And to put forward a shared inclusive and bipartisan vision for a more united America. The Department of Education has two primary tasks. To support educational authorities and educational institutions. To improve their ability to, as I said, prevent hate-based threats.

To understand and be proactive around bullying and harassment, and to ensure that every student has the freedom to learn. Following the United We Stand Summit, the Department of Education launched the Free to Learn initiative last spring. The goal of this initiative is to galvanize states, districts, schools, public health agencies, and local communities to understand, implement, and sustain evidence-based practices and policies that support school safety, mental health, and positive school climates.

A new section of Ed's Best Practices Clearinghouse website provides easy access to critical information, tools and resources related to Free to Learn. That can help build and provide states and local authorities the supports they need to ensure that students have access to healthy learning environments and to address any forms of bullying, violence, and hate in our schools. Organizations can also pledge to become partners and engage in implementing resources and sharing examples of implementation successes and participating in topical webinars and communities of practice.

Which brings us to today. Today is the first of our four-part Free to Learn miniseries. Each webinar will offer evidence-based practices to prevent, address and ameliorate the effects of bullying, violence and hate, while also supporting school safety, school-based mental health and positive school climates. These practices are needed at the key moments in a student and families school experience. When they enter the school or the classroom, when they engage in learning, participate in extracurricular activities, navigate circumstances that might result in differences of opinion or even conflict.

And to utilize various supports and opportunities to enhance their school experiences and academic achievement. Three additional Free to Learn webinars will be offered in the coming weeks focusing on full student participation in school, navigating conflicts and ongoing supports for students to reduce identity-based bullying and violence to promote student connection and well-being. We hope to see you then. We know you'll hear valuable information and strategies that you'll be able to use in your schools and districts today and in future webinars.

So thank you again for being with us, and it's my pleasure to turn it back to Cindy to introduce our first content setting speaker.

**Cindy Carraway-Wilson:** Thank you so much for those words of encouragement and for explaining that Free to Learn approach that we're all taking for that initiative. We greatly

appreciate your ongoing support. And now it's my great pleasure to introduce Dr. Kathleen Ethier, who is the Director of the Division of Adolescent and School Health in the National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion at the Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

Who's going to lead us off in talking about some trends and data and the importance of connection and belonging, as well as let us know about a brand new resource coming up from the CDC that may help. Dr. Ethier.

**Kathleen Ethier:**

Thank you so much. I'm so happy to be here and to be part of this series. I know I've presented as part of the NCSSE series before about safe and supportive and welcoming learning environments, connectedness and adolescent mental health. And I'm excited to be here today to bring all of that together and to provide a new action guide that CDC has released just today to support schools' efforts to promote students' mental health. So to provide some context, as you all know, adolescent mental health has been moving in the wrong direction for more than a decade.

And key indicators of poor mental health have breached alarming levels. In 2021, more than four in 10 high school students felt so persistently sad or hopeless for at least two weeks out of the previous year that they were unable to participate in the regular activities, which we know are signs of depression. And one in 10 students attempted suicide during the previous year. There are striking disparities in the proportion of female students and LGBTQ+ students having these experiences compared to their peers, and there were also differences by race and ethnicity.

For instance, Black students were significantly more likely than Asian, Hispanic, and white students to have attempted suicide in the past year. Female and LGBTQ+ students were more likely to experience depressive symptoms and suicidal thoughts and behaviors than their male and heterosexual peers respectively. In 2021, female and LGBTQ+ students were about twice as likely as their male and heterosexual peers respectively to experience depressive symptoms. And you can see that data here.

We know that many schools have already been making behavioral and mental health a priority and are using the multi-tiered systems of support as a framework in planning and implementing their strategies. The MTSS framework uses a public health approach to promote student well-being by identifying three tiers of prevention to support the needs of the entire school population. Excuse me. In order to take a population level approach in improving mental health, CDC released an action guide today that supports school efforts to promote students' mental health.

This guide was developed for school and district leaders in K through 12. The strategies and approaches in the guide align to MTSS, primarily tiers one and two and can help enhance support that schools have already established. The strategies and approaches within the action guide were identified using a combination of methods including peer-reviewed literature, gray literature

review, expert listening sessions and focus groups. Listening sessions and focus groups help to provide contextual information to ensure that there was a focus on equity.

And that implementation tips considered existing policies, practices, and programs in schools and filled gaps. There are six strategies included in the guide and you can see them here. Increasing students' mental health literacy, promoting mindfulness, promoting social, emotional and behavioral learning, enhancing connectedness, providing psychosocial skills training and cognitive behavioral interventions and supporting school staff well-being. I'll provide a link at the end and I really encourage you all to explore each strategy.

However, I'm going to focus today on one that is central to creating safe, supportive and welcoming learning environments for students, and that is enhancing connectedness. The benefits of school connectedness are significant and extend beyond mental health. In addition to protecting against suicidality and promoting mental health, school connectedness protects young people from risks related to substance use, violence and sexual behavior. It also protects youth from the co-occurrence of these risks, meaning that students who feel connected at school may be less likely to experience multiple risks across these areas.

Schools can enhance connectedness among students, staff, and families by providing relationship building programs, including group sessions for teachers on how to build strong relationships with students and collaborate with parents, sessions for parents on the importance of parental involvement in schools and developing collaborative relationships with teachers. Activities for students that include classroom activities to strengthen peer relationships and school-wide events to raise awareness for students' experiences and needs. These programs can decrease symptoms of depression, anxiety, and other symptoms of poor mental health.

There are other approaches that we also know can improve connectedness and can supplement relationship building programs. Schools can increase connectedness by providing professional development on classroom management techniques and policies and practices that support youth. Linking youth to programs in schools and communities that foster positive connection and engagement. And implementing policies and practices that support LGBTQ youth, including gender and sexuality alliances, professional development for educators, identifying safe spaces and having policies in place to prevent harassment that are enforced.

We know that when schools are safe and supportive for the most vulnerable youth, they are safer and more supportive and less toxic for all youth. In schools that implemented the LGBTQ+ supportive policies and practices that I mentioned, all students who identified as lesbian, gay, and bisexual, and students who identified as heterosexual had improved mental health outcomes. Approaches to build connection within schools should intentionally include and

center students who are at disproportionate risk for being marginalized and disconnected in schools.

Girls, youth who report experiencing racism, youth from racial and ethnic minority groups and youth who identified as LGBTQ+ often feel less connected at school and experience poor mental health. Although racial and ethnic minority students make up over half of the population of students in the US public education system, fewer than two in 10 teachers have racial or ethnic minority identities. This is the notable gap since research has found that having school staff who are representative of the racial and ethnic backgrounds of students in the school can increase connectedness within the school between staff and students.

Other examples of policies and practices that can support connection at school for all students, including students at high risk for being disconnected, include establishing affinity groups for students of color and LGBTQ+ students, for example, gender and sexuality alliances, enacting anti-bullying and anti-harassment policies that specifically protect staff and students against gender and sexual identity-based harassment, enacting trauma-informed policies and practices, especially related to disciplinary practices, for instance, restorative practices.

Thank you all so much for continuing to work to ensure that all schools are safe, supportive, and welcoming spaces for all youth. I invite you to learn more about implementing strategies and approaches to promote student mental health, including enhancing connectedness by exploring our action guide webpages. We also have supporting resources that can be used to help improve LGBTQ+ inclusivity in schools and to help schools select or develop quality inclusive health education curriculum.

Although we know that not all schools will be able to use all of the strategies that we present in the guide or promote on our website, there is something here for everyone. School and district leaders can pick and choose strategies and approaches based on what their existing capacity is and what they are already doing in order to improve the health and safety of young people in their schools. Thank you so much for having me.

**Cindy Carraway-Wilson:** Thank you so much, Dr. Ethier. That was a great review of the data and it's so exciting to have this new guide out with that specific connection focus for this webinar. We'd so greatly appreciate that. And again, we encourage everyone to go look at that guide and the other resources on the CDC website. That link has gone out to you and it'll come back out again later.

Thank you very much. And it's now my great pleasure to introduce Dr. Patti Hershfeltd, who is a DEI amplifier with the California Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support. She's also the founder of Sage Learning Solutions. Patti.

**Patti Hershfeldt:**

Thank you, Cindy. I'm really grateful to be here this morning or afternoon. I'm going to talk to you a little bit more specifically about some strategies that if you're in the classroom right now, you can take away and implement tomorrow. So without any further ado, just following up on what Dr. Ethier talked about was this notion of relationships and how relationships promote those really valuable assets such as connectedness. We talk about belonging a lot.

Do students feel like they belong? I'm sorry, students and staff. I want to expand our audience, if you will, to include the staff in buildings because this has applicability to everyone. Good communication is a huge contributor to sound relationships and this notion of empathy. I'm a former educator, a K-twelve educator, and I can think about times when responding to student behavior really leans heavily on the need to exercise empathy and think about where students come from in order to really respond in a way that's supportive and really entices behavior change.

Oftentimes we'll talk to schools about what do these words mean? And what do these words mean in the context of school and in community and in life? And I came across these four, I would say, defining qualities of relationships. A colleague of mine, Kimberly Yanek at Old Dominion University really broke that down and incorporated some literature and actually some of the work of Brene Brown to help us define that. We tell teachers connect or form relationships with students, but I'm not sure we always do a good job of breaking that down and defining what that means.

There's an amazing resource called the Greater Good Science Center, and it's at UC Berkeley. They have fantastic resources to support educators in some of this work. And they have a few white papers out, and I believe I sent the references that you can access them. But one of the papers talks about thinking about connections and how they happen along a continuum. And the outcomes or benefits of that in addition to what you just heard, includes some improved health and wellbeing, a greater sense of psychological safety, which we know is critical for our students to optimize their learning.

And increasing resiliency, which is a skill that's certainly helpful in learning, but goes far beyond the schoolhouse. And in this paper, they break down these four factors that contribute to high quality connections. And while this work is focused on the workplace, I think that it generalizes to how we might think about connecting with our students. The four factors that they review here include respectful engagement, so really seeing other people, our colleagues, our students, our families, and our community members is having worth and having value, being able to task enable.

So help really setting each other up for success. So what strategies can you employ to help your colleagues or help your students succeed? And further than that, what barriers can you help break down to ensure that success? This notion of trust, which we may take for granted that word, but in fact, trust has implications in the connections that we make. And so what are we doing within

our schools to allow us to feel safe, to take risks, to learn and to be vulnerable. And finally playful and that's just like it sounds.

Let's have fun. Let's have fun learning. Let's have fun as colleagues. Let's open that space because that brings down some of the angst that students, staff, and families might be experiencing. Another piece of work that the Greater Good Science Center did, and this was a number of years ago. They focused and did some research on the benefits of gratitude practices, and I have summarized a few of those here. I think some of us would naturally default to the benefits being that we might have better sense of social emotional wellness or wellbeing, so more generous, more kind, empathetic and helpful. And that certainly, gratitude can strengthen relationships and help improve climate in the workplace. And in our case, that would be the school. Several studies found that more grateful people experience less depression and more resilience following traumatic events. And I know certainly, we're all in the room together with the trauma that so many of our students have and are facing, not just as a result of the pandemic that we're coming out of, but so many current events, as were mentioned earlier. What I found astounding about their research though, is the physiological impact, and they studied cardiac patients who reported these improvements, better sleep, less fatigue, lower levels of cellular inflammation. And they did this by having them journal for eight weeks. And they found the same impacts with teachers when they offered that opportunity to practice gratitude in the classroom.

And so what teachers were asked to do is count their blessing for eight weeks, and that these teachers then experienced this increased life satisfaction, a more positive mood, a greater sense of accomplishment along with decreased negative attitudes toward others, and less emotional exhaustion. And I think that would be clear when we are taking care of ourselves as the adults, we show up as educators that are offering our very best. And so the other outcome of this was they saw some reductions in burnout. In the teaching workforce right now, I think that's a huge benefit. There are some factors influencing who is more likely or more willing to adopt gratitude practices listed here, certainly people who have a desire to change are going to adopt a new practice that might have to do with self-wellness, people with greater trait curiosity. And one thing I read that I thought was really important for us to keep in mind is that culture plays a role in determining what is worthy of gratitude.

So certainly if a teacher says we are going to write thank you notes, what we want to be careful of is that, I'm sorry, we can offer that opportunity for gratitude practices, but we want to be considerate of the cultural differences when we tell students what it is we're offering gratitude for. So it's a nuance that I think is really important for us to remember if we employ these practices. And this slide just simply gives you the link to some of those practices, different ones that the Greater Good Science Center has offered that teachers can bring into the classroom.

Another strategy or what can we do right now, would be to really increase the frequency of behavior-specific praise when we reply to students, when we teach



them academics, we offer the, "What is it that they did well?. And I think that the same, I know the same applies for when we want to support students with behavior anytime we can offer that ratio of 5:1, which is hard. I spend a lot of time in schools, and it's a very hard ratio to reach where we offer five opportunities of positive behavior feedback versus one redirection. But there's a lot of good science to support that striving for that 5:1 ratio is a really important goal. And these are a few benefits of utilizing behavior-specific praise. I think the biggest takeaway from these would be that we are, as the adults, paying attention to the behaviors we want students to demonstrate, and therefore lifting up those students who are demonstrating those, and offering a positive and instructional way to teach those behaviors to students who have not quite mastered that yet.

This is a personal favorite of mine. I sometimes hear, "Well, I only acknowledge students for going above and beyond," and these are just some adult examples of why we wouldn't be okay with that. And many times in schools, a lot of times, traditionally, we offer honor roll. Right? And so honor roll is for students who typically earn A's and B's. But some students, no matter how hard they work, and know matter how hard they study, are just not A and B students. That's not their gift. And so I'm suggesting we instead implement On a Roll, and I took this picture at a local restaurant. And the idea is can we celebrate growth? Whatever that growth is, can we find growth in the students so that we can lift them up, so that their belonging is not dependent upon achievement?

This is a pledge that came out of Santa Clara County Office of Education a couple years ago, and basically asking educators and service providers to commit to learning students' names and making sure they pronounce them correctly right from the beginning. And this certainly has some cultural implications as well. So what's in a name? Being able to correctly pronounce your students and colleagues names, it shows respect and demonstrates that cultural sensitivity. It reduces othering and it fosters connection. And quite frankly, it increases the comfort and is simple and yet impactful. And so that might take practice initially, but certainly the benefits are important. And then finally, fostering community at the door. And I've seen a lot of very cool resources coming out around this, just greeting students at the door. It also provides an opportunity for some instruction. So a student enters and that student needs some pre-correction around particular social, emotional, behavioral or academic competencies. That's a ideal way to privately offer that pre-correction.

And this incorporates identity building and relationship skills, and being creative about how we welcome students at the door. There is science behind this. And I'm going to just de-animate here. This idea that when we greet students at the door, it increases engagement by 20%, disruptions reduced by 9%. And I think most significantly here, just greeting students at the door can make a difference in regaining 60 minutes of instructional time to the day. And so blending that welcoming at the door, that welcoming strategy with the academic piece as well. And this is just something else for us to think about. How are we going about welcoming families? And this is a publication that's through the PBIS, the

National Center on PBIS, and thinking about are we being intentional and sincere? So are we actually inviting families to the table, to schools for activities and events?

Something I think is important to consider, we are all in education, so maybe it's a good assumption that we had good educational experiences, maybe not, but that's not case for all our families. And so when we invite families to school who might be a little anxious about coming, who might not be able to read, that we're very clear about what their responsibility is. So if we invite a family member to come and we're having a concert that we're going to help set up, and that when they arrive, that we stick to what we ask them to do. And even considering meeting families who don't feel comfortable in the school building, in the community somewhere, in a place that's shared, there's a shared trust for both educators and families. We just have to be creative and they'll come. So thank you so much for this opportunity. And I will share.

**Cindy Carraway-Wilson:** Great. Thank you so much, Patti, for all that information. You provided a lot of different practices and pieces of approaches that we can do to create that welcoming environment. I particularly was grateful for your gratitude elements because a lot of times, we hear about gratitude often, but we forget that gratitude isn't just about being thankful to somebody for doing something to you, but that it sends those messages of, "If I can be grateful to you and with you, then we can all belong and have a sense of connectedness there that may not have existed before." So again, thank you so much for all of that information. Now we're going to welcome our next speaker to the screen, and I'm so happy to introduce Ms. Cheryl Greene, who's the senior director of Welcoming Schools at the Human Rights Campaign Foundation, who's going to speak to us a little bit about the importance of welcoming LGBTQ+ students. Cheryl.

**Cheryl Greene:** Thank you and thanks for having me. It's really wonderful listening to Dr. Hershfeldt, and listening about gratitude. And I also want to say I'm really grateful for Dr. Ethier as well for all the work that she continues to lead on. And I encourage you to take a look at those resources as well. So I lead a program at the Human Rights Campaign Foundation called Welcoming Schools. And I guess where I want to start is by saying that all students should be in classrooms and schools that welcome and affirm them for exactly who they are with all of their intersecting identities. As educators, it's our responsibility to ensure that that happens.

While it's important to recognize the restrictions that many educators are facing in states across the country, I would like to suggest that we can all be a part of ensuring our youth are in spaces that they're not only safe, but that they can thrive. So the Welcoming Schools Program, as I said, a program within the Human Rights Campaign Foundation is one tool to help educators with the ability to serve all students. So we are developed as a resource for educators. One to create the competency of understanding LGBTQ people, terms, topics, but also the confidence to be able to create an atmosphere where bias-based bullying is addressed, hurtful comments are addressed, and really the ability to

confidently respond to things that come up in the moment. And we believe that having both the competency and the confidence creates an opportunity for kids to be in spaces where, as I said, that they're not only safe, but that they can thrive.

Our approach is grounded in research that links improved academic achievement and social-emotional wellbeing with an LGBTQ inclusive environment. So what I want to talk about today is we'll talk about why this work is important by providing some recent data compiled by the human rights campaign. And then I'll just talk briefly about ways that you can support LGBTQ youth. But I'll start with this. Unless we understand the complexities of experiences the students come to school, with all of their intersecting identities, we really can't do this work well. So part of our work is creating an opportunity for the work to have an intersectional lens. And with that, we want to make sure that in addition to getting the competency with our resources and professional development, that we're then also looking at policies and procedures to ensure they're equitable for marginalized students as well.

So why is this work important? And again, I'll ground the why in the research. Lots of research out there, but we just conducted a study in our 2023 LGBT Youth Report. It was partnered with the University of Connecticut. It surveyed LGBTQ youth around the United States from ages 13 through 18 from all 50 states and the district of Columbia. That QR code can take you to the full report. But I just want to point out some key things that came out of this sort of ground us in the why this work is so important.

So the first thing we'll talk about is the average age that LGBTQ+ youth realized that they were something other than heterosexual. And that was around 11, 3.5% realized it at five or younger, and almost 85% realized at 13 or younger. And you can read as well the average that kids realized that they were transgender or gender expansive, something other than cisgender. And I say this because we're not talking about LGBTQ topics early on, and kids need us to be talking about LGBTQ topics. They're figuring out who they are during these key developmental years, and then we're waiting until late in high school and college to learn about LGBTQ people is not helpful, and in fact could be harmful to the well-being of students. Safety, always an issue, one in three, transgender and gender expansive youth, and one in four LGBTQ youth felt unsafe using school bathrooms over half of transgender and gender-expansive youth. And four in 10 LGBTQ youth felt unsafe in school locker rooms.

Verbal harassment, physical violence, almost six in 10 LGBTQ youth had been verbally or physically harassed at school once in the prior 30 days. When I look at these stats, and I'll leave these on here for a minute, these are students in your classrooms. They're not learning, they're not safe, and learning is the last thing on their minds. They're worried about how they're going to get to their next class without getting harassed, what they're going to do at lunch. And as educators, it's our job to make sure that we are turning the table here and ensuring these kids not only are safe, but can thrive. Acceptance, less than half of transgender and gender expansive youth were ever able to use a school

bathroom that matches their gender identity. Less than one in six report that others always use their correct pronouns, one in four are always able to dress and express themselves in ways that match their gender identity, and one in three youth report that others always use their correct names.

So all that data sort of is the groundwork for the why this work is so important. So let's quickly just talk about ways that you can support LGBTQ youth. So Welcoming Schools has a really helpful checklist on ways to create LGBTQ inclusive spaces. There are many things on the list that can be done. I'm going to say this again. There are many things on this list that can be done regardless of where you live or how restrictive your state and local laws are. For instance, we can all use non-gendered language to address our classes. Instead of saying boys and girls or ladies and gentlemen, you can say students, you can say scholars, or any number of ways that don't reflect the restrictions of binary language. Just this little adjustment could signal the student that you see them for who they are.

And many things on this list, if you're able to use and honor students' pronouns, and share your own if you use them, simply using correct pronouns for students can dramatically increase experiences in school. I encourage you to check out this free resource on the Welcoming Schools website. We have other checklists, we have book lists. And I encourage you to use, actually, all the tools that are available to you through other national organizations, through state and local organizations that can give you, as educators, the tools that you need to have the ability to ensure that all your students can thrive. Because we need all of you. And again, I thank you for having me and giving me the opportunity to share.

**Cindy Carraway-Wilson:** Excellent. Thank you so much, Cheryl. Again, another great presentation. I appreciate your emphasis right at the very beginning that the work that you're doing as well as all the other speakers that we've heard so far are really talking about welcoming all students and affirming their identity exactly as who they are. I'd love that. That's a great quote, and I think I'm going to be using that. And to be focusing in on that intersectionality of identity, none of us has one identity, we all carry a variety of identities with us that should be honored and recognized. We're going to hear now from a collection of people who are doing the work on the ground. So our goal with having our panelists come in now is to take some of the information that you heard from our three context setting speakers and others, and talk a little bit about how they're actually doing this work on the ground, how they're creating welcoming environments at the door, in the classroom, and in the school culture broadly.

So I'd like to welcome Dr. Michael Konrad from Arizona, Ms. Silvia Torres from California, and Dr. Julie Goldman, also from California. And we're going to go through a series of questions now to really go deep into what folks are doing in their schools. So Dr. Konrad is with Pueblo Gardens, pardon me, PreK-8 School in the Tucson Unified School District. Ms. Silvia Torres is with Families in Schools in Los Angeles, and Dr. Julie Goldman is the Director of Equity Curriculum and Instruction at San Diego County Office of Education.

Welcome everybody. Thank you so very much for being here today. So we heard a lot of different information about the importance of connection and belonging, and getting kids in the door. So I actually want to begin our conversation with asking each of you to define or describe, what do we mean by welcoming? What does it feel like? What is it to welcome another individual? I'd like to start with you, Dr. Konrad.

**Michael Konrad:** Thank you, Cindy. I feel that welcoming is when you feel included and appreciated. It's when you feel that you can be a part of something enough that you can share who you are, you can share your passions, you can share your personality, and have that connectedness to whatever that community is.

**Cindy Carraway-Wilson:** Excellent, thank you. Move over to you, Silvia.

**Silvia Torres:** Thank you. At Families and Schools, we see a welcoming environment as providing a safe space where students and families feel seen, valued for the Funds of Knowledge and what they can contribute. Louis Moll's research does highlight that families come with a wealth of life experiences, and we feel that creating that welcoming environment entails really knowing who they are. And a welcoming environment is creating a space and a school site for them to feel valued as families, as students, to understand their culture, their practices, and really take into account the experiences they have in their lives, and create those spaces, so then school is a place where they feel welcome, and safe to learn as well.

**Cindy Carraway-Wilson:** Excellent. Thank you so very much. And Dr. Goldman, over to you. How would you define or describe welcoming?

**Julie Goldman:** Similar to the other two answers, in a school context, welcoming is an on-ramp to creating an infrastructure of belonging. It's a safe space where every child feels seen, and heard, and valued, whether that's on the bus or walking to school, in the front office, on the playground, or in a classroom. And welcoming means that educators intentionally design learning where students see themselves represented and reflected in the curriculum and instruction. This means we create safe spaces for meaningful dialogue where students can ask questions to better understand the world, wrestle with big ideas, and learn from one another.

**Cindy Carraway-Wilson:** Excellent. So those are great descriptions. Everything from that individual student being able to claim their identity and be proud of that identity to the families feeling as if they're being represented, and included, and feel safe there. And then the opportunities to be able to have these challenging or courageous conversations as a means of really being proactive in trying to minimize identity-based bullying or violence, because we're having conversations instead of being physical or engaging in emotional bullying either. So thank you so much for that. Now we know that you are all working in districts that have a broad diversity of students, but we also have heard from our speakers, the most recent one, Cheryl, who said that focusing on a specific segment on the population in the school still affects the entire school climate.

So what I'd like to do is I'd like to hear a little bit more about some of the specific more vulnerable populations that each of you mentioned in our conversations. This time. I'm going to begin with you, Julie. Can you highlight some of the strategies that you see as being used to create those welcoming environments and being able to facilitate the conversations that are around the events happening in Israel and Palestine right now?

**Julie Goldman:**

Sure. Well, I serve at the county office level, which here in San Diego it includes forty-two districts, 129 charter schools in five community college districts. And on the Monday morning after October 7th, our local educators asked us for age-appropriate support to discuss Israel and Gaza with their students. So our resource guide most importantly, first reminds educators to pay close attention to students who are Jewish or Muslim, or who have Israeli or who are Israeli or Palestinian or may have family members or friends in the region, and students who may be worried about how this crisis could impact them here in the US.

The guide also aims to help students better understand this event and place it in both a broader global context and make meaningful local connections. For example, we're currently partnering with local Jewish and Muslim organizations to provide relevant professional learning about the history of these communities in our region. So to engage in productive dialogue on this topic or any complex discussion, we need to create safe spaces, and we have this other guide dialogue with compassion.

One entry point strategy that schools often use to create welcoming environments is to establish discussion norms. Basically, we want to identify how we want to show up together as a group. If the discussion, for example, is about one's identity, the question might be, or where were you ... when were you first aware of your race? What circumstances drove this recognition? An effective strategy is to ask the question and have participants record their answers on chart paper or index cards or even a jam board. In this way, the teacher can place the answers around the room randomly and hold a gallery walk activity.

This can support students and adults to be more willing to share their perspectives openly. And it's also really important to keep in mind that both the bookends here, the opening and the closing of these discussions are key. So a few examples of closing discussion at strategies might be like we heard before, the powerful research on gratitude to extend gratitude to everyone for their courage or willingness to participate in a difficult but necessary conversation or invite participants to share what they learned about themselves or what they're taking away from the conversation. Or one that we commonly use ourselves is to request a one-word closure and then create some kind of Wordle and open up the space next time in the next session with those takeaways.

**Cindy Carraway-Wilson:** Those are some great examples that you provided, and I love the fact that you covered both the opening and the closing for the compassionate dialogue for our audience, those two guides were sent out via chat, so please do click on the links and check them out. And again, thank you so much, Julie, for that

information. And Michael, are you comfortable to jump in here? And if so, can you highlight some of the strategies that you're using in your schools to create those welcoming environments for your LGBTQ students?

**Michael Konrad:**

Absolutely. For us, we really wanted to start with the professional development for our teachers and our staff. We saw the need as increasing teacher's efficacy because as adults, if the adults feel ill-equipped to answer questions or deal with situations, then it's very easy for them to shy away, not because they don't have empathy or kindness or want to help, but sometimes they just feel like they don't have the tools to do so effectively and they don't want to mess things up. They don't want to make situations worse. And so sometimes I can create hesitancy. And so our big push was on the professional development for our staff and we increased their efficacy by providing professional development around a number of areas related to these topics. And that included examining our own internal biases so that we could really see where we as adults are coming into the system and how we might perceive different situations. We provided professional development on ideas of inclusivity and how to create equity within our system and our practices. We looked to professional development around anti-bullying to really make sure we're aggressively addressing situations where students are being targeted for being different.

And then we also spent a lot of time focused on just PD on the necessity for directly engaging in these topics. And a lot of that involved looking at the data about the mental health issues that can negatively affect our students, the disproportional dangers affecting students who identify as LGBTQ+ within our community and how it really is important that we as the adults caring for our students are actively engaged in supporting them. And then once we were getting our adults to feel more comfortable and given more tools to be able to address these things within the school environment, we made sure that they were provided resources from books to activities utilized within a classroom environment so that all students could feel seen and included in the curriculum and activities that they were seeing within the classroom environment.

And then we looked at adapting policies and practices around our school. We reviewed our dress code, we ensured that we had non-gendered restrooms available for all students. We looked at making sure our policies were in place for accepting students' use of preferred names, preferred pronouns so they could feel comfortable within the environment, expressing themselves in ways that helped them feel connected to our school and our school community. And then finally, we looked at really just setting standards as school setting. And a lot of that was about our leadership and our team who supervises the school and school community as a whole, really setting the standard, setting the tone on how we would teach and reteach with students and community members when things would come up, when questions would come up, and how we would engage with things so that anyone else within our community would done and would understand that it was okay to engage and make sure that our students are protected and cared for.

**Cindy Carraway-Wilson:** Excellent. That's a multi-tiered approach to really implementing and rolling that out. That's wonderful. And again, I love the focus on both the confidence and the competence and being able to provide both of those to the adults so that they can engage and therefore model some of this behavior for the students. Wonderful.

And Silvia, coming over to you, I'd love for you to tell us a little bit about the welcoming environments for families and students who are newcomers or newer immigrants or in families who may not be speaking the language or having particularly culturally connected to the school.

**Silvia Torres:** Wonderful, thank you. Yes, my peer panelists have shared a lot of the resources and strategy that we also use along in partnership with many of the schools that we work with. But when we talk about newcomer and immigrant families, the most important thing I think would be to create these partnerships within the community. Identify community centers, community partners that we can partner up to provide services at the school, especially if we may not be the experts, identifying those experts that can provide the information they need. And also, with that, being able to build a capacity of our teams to understand the students that are coming into our school sites understand their values or culture and how do we best support them.

And so when we talk about creating a welcoming environment, our families and schools, we do like to focus on four domains, which will be physical environment, policies and procedures, welcoming staff, and then communication. And how does that relate to creating a welcoming environment for our newcomer families? And so when we talk about physical spaces, is our space welcoming to our families? Is there multiple languages being spoke at the school site? Is there art representing the diversity within the school site? Is there access to an individual that can translate? Are there resources families can use?

So we want to take that into account. And then we talk about policies. Many of our families may be new to our educational system, maybe the educational system in their region might've been different than ours. So how do we provide that information to our families in the language that they understand, or how do we identify someone that can do so for them. And also, it's also important for us to have a variety of workshops we provide to all, but then also having those additional workshops that go a little more detail into understanding our educational system, understanding how do we communicate with teachers, how do we communicate if there is an issue that took place.

So we want to make sure our families have the capacity and understand the policies and procedures and host meetings where families feel welcome, where maybe it's changing the language. I wanted to share, we worked recently with public schools, New York Unified School District, and in one of our meetings that we were having, there was a colleague that shared, we have a lot of refugees and we have a lot of refugee centers. And they're like, instead of having them come to us, why don't we go to them? And we said, yes, that is a wonderful



idea. And she said, "Let me find a translator. We can go over to the community and they will feel more space to learn about everything we can offer at the school." And that will support them feeling more welcome when they do come to our school site because they'll be aware of, like they'll know a staff member, they'll be aware of the information we can provide for them. So that was a great opportunity for, as an educator, instead of having families come to us, we go to the families.

And then welcoming staff, it's about really building the capacity of their knowledge, right? Talking about those biases. Also, about being trauma-informed. Many of our students do come with trauma and it's how do we create curriculum, how do we create activities within our classroom to be mindful about that. Talking to our staff about understanding our family's lived experiences or backgrounds, culture and trauma is essential.

And then lastly, when it comes into communication is do we have someone on staff or can we find someone within the community to provide the information for our families? And also be mindful that literacy levels. There are some families that may not read or write or there are some languages that don't have a written language. And so we want to be mindful about how do we find someone within the community to be able to assure families are getting the information that is essential for their students to be successful. And also being mindful of how are we communicating is it suggests our old method of just a flyer that goes in the backpack. We want to be mindful of we can use apps, we can use social media, we can do send voice messages to families.

So those are some of the things that we've worked directly with our school sites in assuring that our new families are feeling welcome. So those are the four domains that we like to focus on and really creating that welcoming environment. And we work individually with our schools to have each domain be understood by the staff, and so they then brainstorm how they can incorporate it into their school sites.

**Cindy Carraway-Wilson:** Excellent. Wonderful. Again, another example of a ton of approaches and opportunities, and I love the way that you broke it down into those four domains to make it really clear, and I appreciate that that New York district was mentioning how going out to the community center instead of always having them come into the school, which can be intimidating, right? Absolutely. Thank you so much. We'll move on to our next question, and I'd like to hear from each of you on this one. How did you introduce this concept of welcoming strategies to your school teams, both the adults and also to the students? Here I'd like to start with you Silvia, if that's okay.

**Silvia Torres:** Thank you. So with families and schools, like we mentioned, we partner with multiple schools and our partnerships look very different. But with us it's definitely starting with school staff and building the capacity of the school staff and providing our family engagement strategies institutes, which will cover mindsets being mindful about the language that we use, going from a deficit to a strength-based perspective. How do we create a welcoming environment? We

talk about the four domains and we talk a lot about the research of family engagement and really being equal partner in students' education to support their lifelong success. So we have a series of workshops and activities that we have staff members go through, and that really helps tie into the importance of being that equal partner with families. We also do school site visits where we have an opportunity to come and assess what the schools are doing to create that welcoming environment. And many times, it's sort of seeing an outside perspective as to what that looks like.

We also conduct focus groups really to have an opportunity to listen from our families, from our teachers, from our administrators and our students about how they're feeling welcome at the school site. And it's very interesting to see that my perspective as a staff member can be very different from a parent and a student and even our own teachers. So really having that opportunity to hear the various voices that make up our school system to be able to make sure that we're continuing the efforts that we are implementing are being successful. And so I would highly encourage for anyone that works at a school site to really create an opportunity to partner or even internally create an opportunity to create those focus groups, do some family surveys.

I think family surveys have been very successful for us in the sense of getting to know families that various languages being spoken at home and in the topics that they're interested in. And many times we assume we have read some really good topics that we're going to share with families. And in reality, they might be interested in something very different. One of the ones I want to share would be cyber bullying. Families just like, oh, what is bullying? What's cyber bullying? And what is the difference? And so we created an entire module to have families fully understand which the definition of cyber bullying and bullying, and even identify if our student might've been being bullied.

And so it was really important of just even building our own capacity as staff members, but also supporting our families to understand what is taking place at the school site and being able to hear their voices. I think hearing their voices really helps us assure that we're creating that welcoming environment because what we interpret as welcoming may not be welcoming to them.

And just one last thing I do want to share is that communication component really communicating with families with purpose. One of our school sites in Los Angeles, a middle school, the principal pay teachers an extra hour to make personal phone calls to our school sites to see just how families were doing. And that actually, they had an increase of families showing up for in-person events because they felt that that teacher called not for anything related to the student's academic, but just to see how the family was doing. And therefore that helped create that welcoming environment for them. They felt a connection and they had a teacher that they couldn't speak to.

**Cindy Carraway-Wilson:** Nice. What a wonderful example. I can imagine being a parent and getting a call like that, immediately, that gut clench of uh-Oh, and then to have it, how are

you? That's a beautiful refrain. All right, I'd like to go ahead and bounce over to you, Julie.

**Julie Goldman:**

Sure. So again, in the schools that we serve, introducing welcoming strategies and schools is closely linked to that idea of creating solid norms. Teachers will generally emphasize empathy, respect, confidentiality, conflict management, and these kinds of ideas when they're setting their norms. For example, a few of the messages are that we commonly see are let's share the airspace. What's said here, stays here. And what's learned here leaves here. And we challenge ideas and not people. So another strategy that we often see widely implemented is using open-ended questions to support dialogue and open-ended questions allows the speaker to decide how deep they want to go with the conversation.

For example, just as we just heard about the empathy interviews or some kind of focus groups with students and families, we often ask and we want a survey and gather information on how welcome that they feel in their schools. And so to do this, we might ask open-ended questions such as, what is one barrier to us building a welcoming and healing community for all. Or what gives you hope that we can build a welcoming and healing community for everyone.

**Cindy Carraway-Wilson:** Excellent. And it's important to get both of those sides of that coin, the barriers and the hopeful side because it's easy to get caught in the barrier side and get stuck in that deficit we've-got-to-fix-this approach. Yes, thank you. And back over to you, Michael, how would you describe how you introduced welcoming to your team and students?

**Michael Konrad:**

For us, I feel lucky, it's almost as if the universe was poised for us to do this work at the time that we did for us, our school and our school district has historically been very open and very focused on the idea of creating inclusivity for students around ideas of race and ethnicity and family, and including that family and family engagement into the fabric of our schools.

And so for us, we had a number of students beginning to ask a lot of questions. We had families needing support and asking for our assistance in helping their students who were exploring ideas about gender identity. And we were seeing things within the school environment. And it all just kind of helped us realize that we just needed to add to our focus, the need to support students from the LGBTQ+ community and to make that part of the fabric of our school. And so for us, it was very natural. And when it came to introducing it to the students, I always feel lucky the students are the ones who are always ahead of us, even though we're the adults, even though we're the ones who are in charge, the students are ahead of us in that progression of learning what is coming next. And so for them coming into this idea of the need to focus on being welcoming, it was a very easy and natural fit for them.

**Cindy Carraway-Wilson:** That's wonderful. So the welcoming focus specifically in the LGBTQ+ area was a natural growth from all the other equity work and welcoming work you are already doing. That's wonderful to hear.

All right. I'd like to go ahead and ... This is going to be a speed round. If you could name maybe one or two shifts that you've seen in your schools or classrooms or heard about in your schools and classrooms that are a result of your efforts. And here, I'd like to begin with you, Michael.

**Michael Konrad:** Absolutely. I had a great shift of some teachers utilizing some books and resources that really showcased all students in ways to help them run activities where when students, especially younger elementary students were asking questions or saying things about why is that other student different, addressing it not necessarily in a punitive way, but saying, Hey, we need to use this as a learning experience to really make sure everyone understands that all people are welcome and that there are differences among our students. And that our stereotypical ideas of male and female roles and identities with students are not necessarily the only ways to look at things. And so seeing some of our teachers being able to leverage different books and different resources and include different stories within their classroom environment so that all students felt welcome, it was something that not only created difference for our kids, but also for our parents.

We had some family members who they themselves sometimes struggled with how to address these things, and they were so welcome to have school staff willing to help them and help their students through those situations.

**Cindy Carraway-Wilson:** That's excellent. That's a great example. Thank you. Silvia, what do you have to add to this?

**Silvia Torres:** On our end, I think one of the biggest things we have when our teachers and staff member go through the institute is really that mind shift seeing from going from a deficit perspective to a strength-based perspective. And then this allows teachers to become more intentional about getting to know their students and their families at their school sites and really incorporating their funds of knowledge into the classroom. So I think for me it's really that mindset shift with our teachers and how that then trickles down. And really, families do see the impact when teachers are being more intentional and especially when they use the funds of knowledge to really incorporate and have families come and support on-site based on their life experiences. So that's, I think, one of the most rewarding things is seeing that shift in mindset and talking about now that we're seeing from strength-based perspective, identifying those barriers that families might have of being able to be engaged and what can we do to remove those?

**Cindy Carraway-Wilson:** That's wonderful, because those kinds of shifts can be so challenging to achieve for sure. And Julie, what would you like to add?

**Julie Goldman:** I would add that, well, when teachers asked us to create the educator guides, both the community-informed ones that highlight a specific heritage month or event, and the ones that we created due to an immediate response to a specific event or need or crisis, teachers asked us to keep them streamlined and only include like five to seven book selections per grade span and we tried to do that.

Educators also, they trust us to provide these curated resources so that they can have meaningful scholarly classroom discussions based in history and primary sources. So one shift that we've noticed is that teachers are learning about these topics and exploring media literacy alongside their students. We've also received a lot of feedback from teachers that they feel more confident teaching the content, and this has resulted in increased numbers of diverse classroom libraries and instructional tech sets.

**Cindy Carraway-Wilson:** Excellent. And seeing that diversity in the literature, in the classroom resources and in other spaces helps that sensation of feeling welcome, like they belong and they're seen and heard in that environment. That's excellent.

We're going to go and do another speed round. So it's going to be a somewhat brief conversation here, although we may be able to come back to it. And we know in some areas of the country, talking about some of the issues around specific populations of people or specific approaches can be a bit challenging. So in these areas, what are some other skills, some foundational skills that can be taught to create welcoming environments for all students? Silvia, I'd like to start with you here.

**Silvia Torres:** Thank you. Definitely top of the list would be empathy. There is power in meeting families where they're at and remembering that all families want their best for their children.

**Cindy Carraway-Wilson:** Excellent, thank you. All right, and Julie?

**Julie Goldman:** So one foundational protocol to support students' dialogue skills is to practice constructivist listening. And so typically students will work in pairs or dyads and they each respond to a prompt with equal time. And when one person is speaking, the other person just listens fully without interrupting, no paraphrasing, responding or looking at their phone or anything. So simply sharing our story with another person provides this opportunity to create authentic connections. And while the constructivist listening protocol stipulates confidentiality, the active listening and being listened to builds trust in a safe and really supportive way.

**Cindy Carraway-Wilson:** Excellent. Great example, thank you. And Michael?

**Michael Konrad:** For us, we spent a lot of time working with our students and our staff and talking about what it means to be a bystander in situations where they saw disparity, where they saw whether it was bullying or conflict or issues where people were being treated negatively, and the importance on making sure that as a bystander you don't step away, but instead step into the situation in ways that are appropriate, and making sure folks felt like they had the right tools to be able to do that in a constructive way.

**Cindy Carraway-Wilson:** Excellent. These are some great examples of things that you can do kind of quickly, even if there are restrictions, policies and legal restrictions that kind of

guide your conversations a bit. They're all human skills versus skills for a specific population necessarily. Thank you so much.

We're going to pause here for a moment so I can close out the content delivery section of the webinar. We are still going into our live Q&A, so if you haven't yet done so please click that Q&A icon in your Zoom control panel and add your comments and questions so that we can pose them to our speakers. So we want to thank all of you, our audience members for being here. We're loving seeing those reaction icons come up the side of the screen. It's really helpful and we appreciate all the questions that you've submitted. I also want to thank our speakers for coming here and spending the time that you have to prepare your responses and prepare your presentations. We are going to be hearing a little bit more from them in our Q&A area.

I'd like to remind everybody to go visit our website at [nccsle.safesupportivelearning.ed.gov](https://nccsle.safesupportivelearning.ed.gov) and you can get not just the resources that were mentioned here in this webinar and the recording of this webinar, but there are a variety of other resources there that really directly address school climate and conditions for learning. And of course the [bestpracticesclearinghouse.ed.gov](https://bestpracticesclearinghouse.ed.gov) has a ton of resources and there are going to be more resources that'll be listed specifically in relation to the Free to Learn approaches that we're trying to highlight. Our upcoming webinars are right around the corner.

In two weeks on the 13th, we have another Free to Learn miniseries installment, and this one is focusing in on full student participation. So once we have them in the door, because we've created our welcoming environment, how do we fully engage our young people in academics, in their peer groups and in extracurricular activities?

In January, we have our third Free to Learn mini-series installation, and this is around managing conflict, managing the inevitable differences that happen in our schools that can sometimes result in disagreements. How can we navigate and provide skills to our students to avoid conflict and instead engage in some of these courageous conversations that we heard about today?

Also in January on the 31st we have another human trafficking child exploitation webinar coming up, and this one's going to be focusing on what happens when we make a report of child trafficking and how can we do that with the process and how do we also support the students while we are engaging in that process?

And then the last one on this list is on February 14th, the fourth Free to Learn webinar, and this is focusing in on the additional supports that students can have and take advantage of to be able to reduce the potential for identity-based bullying and violence, and also to increase sense of belonging, mental health and school participation. So we hope we see you at some of those webinars.

Before you leave today, we'd like you to take a few minutes to click the link, which will go into chat now and we'll go back into chat later as well, to provide

us feedback. We do use your feedback to guide our content development and we also will be providing the questions that you provided here and any additional questions you give to the department to guide content in the future.

And now I'd like to go back over to our presenters and speakers and invite everybody to turn their webcams on and we're going to jump into some of the questions that have been coming into the Q&A. Again, it's not too late to add your questions if you'd like to add a question to respond.

The first question I actually have is going out to Julie specifically, and we're going to start there, if anybody else wants to add to it, you most certainly can. And this question is, what support or training is available to teachers to help encourage them to make changes to establish more welcoming environments in the classroom?

**Julie Goldman:** Well, thank you. One of the projects that we have through our county office to do just this is called WRITE, it's the Writing Redesigned for Innovative Teaching and Equity, and it's a national academic excellence model for professional development, it supports TK-12 schools and districts to implement equity-centered culturally and linguistically responsive literacy in both English and Spanish across instructional contexts. And so we really consider ourselves, these work with teachers around instructional design and we are instructional designers, and so we engage in this process by knowing who our students are and who our communities are, and then we focus on creating the conditions for meaningful dynamic dialogue.

**Cindy Carraway-Wilson:** Excellent, thank you so much. Does anybody else have anything that you might want to suggest as a resource for teachers?

**Silvia Torres:** At Families and Schools, we do offer the Family Engagement Institute, and it's an opportunity to really just dive into mindset matters, creating that welcoming environment. It really provides staff member and school leaders an understanding of the various components and the role that they can actively play in really creating a welcoming environment for families. So I invite everyone to visit our website for additional resources.

**Cindy Carraway-Wilson:** Excellent, thank you so much.

**Michael Konrad:** And I'd say jump on [welcomingschools.org](http://welcomingschools.org), lots of great resources linked there.

**Cindy Carraway-Wilson:** Excellent, thank you. And let's not forget the new resource coming out through the CDC. There is a lot of information there on connection and mental health in general because that's also a big piece of the work that we're doing.

So the next question that I'd like to ask, and this goes out to whomever wants to respond, do you all think that this work includes other people related to schools such as school secretaries, bus drivers, custodians, and other members of the school community? And how do you envision them helping to create that welcoming? So I see you nodding, Silvia. Do you want to jump in there?

**Silvia Torres:** Yes, I can share. On my end, I'll give a really quick example. At one of my school sites, we had a front office person who was the kindest person to our families when she knew what events were taking place on campus, but if we failed as staff members to share that, she was not a very friendly person. So yes, every single member at a school site plays a role in creating that welcoming environment, whether that's someone that's going to help a family get to the meeting room, to get to a teacher's classroom, to get to a building. So we all do play an essential role in creating that welcoming environment. So we strongly encourage for every member at the school site to have an understanding of how they can welcome families.

**Cindy Carraway-Wilson:** Excellent, thank you. Does anybody else want to speak to how other school personnel might participate in the welcoming climate? Okay, so I'll go to another question here.

Does anybody have any suggestions for or ideas on good surveys for families to take in order to determine what their needs and desires are? Some of you talked about kind of doing needs assessments or assessing how you discover what the needs are for families. So this might be one that we have to maybe punt because I know that some of you made surveys. Oh, Julie, go ahead.

**Julie Goldman:** We'll often put out initial surveys, but one resource that we've used to gather really in-depth information for, we have a county-wide Equity Blueprint for Action, is having a world cafe. So it's a protocol that you can use around different themes. So we identified with the communities that we're working with the themes ahead of time, and then these communities came in and they all commented kind of what I was talking about before with the challenges and barriers. And I'm glad to share the resources on how to hold a world cafe. But then once you have that information from the various communities on the different themes, then you can look for the trends and patterns. It's really a great way to capture in-depth information.

**Cindy Carraway-Wilson:** Excellent, thank you. Okay. Yes, Patti, go.

**Patti Hershfeldt:** I was just going to suggest that I think most schools or many schools use climate survey data or collect climate survey data where there's family voice expressed. I've seen a growth, and I'm not advocating for this, but Panorama is a for gathering that. And I more and more find that that data isn't often reviewed by very many other than just educational leadership. And so I think engaging youth and having them look at the data because it's anonymous and get their insights on family perspective, teacher perspective and their own perspectives. But I feel like that data isn't accessed and used quite enough. And that's a great resource that's already collected.

**Cindy Carraway-Wilson:** Yeah, absolutely. And there's a whole bunch of different data sources. And we have heard in the past from some schools and districts that really do engage students in that way to help analyze the data and have conversations about what does that mean for us in our community. Right. Let's see, sorry, my little questions are moving around a bit.



Does anybody have any resources for constructive bystander upstanding kind of work? Somebody mentioned that bystander piece. I'm not sure if there's lots of resource questions. Kathleen?

**Kathleen Ethier:** This is Kathleen. Yeah, so our Division of Violence Prevention has information on bystander interventions which have been demonstrated to be effective in reducing bullying and sexual violence. And so you can go to the CDC website and look for bystander intervention so you can find some additional resources there.

**Cindy Carraway-Wilson:** Wonderful, thank you. Lots of resource questions and we'll definitely be posting these questions out as well.

So there is a question, so we talked a little bit, Silvia, you spoke a lot about language, but this is a question that can go to you and any others in the group. How might improved language access for families promote improved mental health for students? Or even if not mental health, maybe being more general, but about promoting engagement or welcoming for students? Anybody want to speak to that a little bit?

**Silvia Torres:** I think the one thing that I would add is to also be mindful in terms of even different languages, which also different cultures around mental health and understanding what mental health is. So I think it would be very important to really work with someone who specializes to then be able to also identify a community member who can look at that resource and have some feedback as to how that resource can be understood by the community members because we have to be very mindful about the language that we use. In many communities, it can be a very taboo subject, something that it's not spoken about, and others they welcome and thrive in it. And maybe it might just be sometimes even in translation, the word can mean very different and sometimes you have to explain it and massage the language a little more for families.

**Cindy Carraway-Wilson:** Excellent, thank you. Okay. Kathleen?

**Kathleen Ethier:** Yeah, one of the strategies that emerged in the literature and that we talked about in our focus groups that is in the guide is mental health literacy. And I think that speaks, in some ways, directly to language. I mean, it absolutely at its core is about educating students about mental health, but I think we could look at it in a more expansive way to say, what do school staff need to know? How do we create a school staff that has mental health literacy?

And then by extension, can we provide broader education to families, to the community around mental health literacy so that we can start to, I think as Silvia mentioned, break down some of the stigma around talking about mental health. It is a real barrier for young people if in their families there is stigma around having mental health problems or talking about mental health to create the language, to give young people a language, to give their families the language, to give the support systems in their schools the language to talk about mental health, I think can break down some of those stigmas.

We absolutely do not want to disrespect anyone's cultural approaches and their understanding of mental health, but at the same time, we know that families really want to support the health and well-being of their kiddos. And so the more that we can do to kind of bridge some of those gaps to provide everyone the language to be able to talk about what's happening with them, I think will bring those families closer together, will bring those families closer to their schools and will provide young people with the resources that they need.

**Cindy Carraway-Wilson:** Yeah, absolutely. So it's about general education around mental health literacy and the language, not just different languages, but the language of mental health as another form of language kind of acquisition. Great. Anybody else want to share anything on that topic?

**Patti Hershfeldt:** Well, Cindy, you expanded that question beyond mental health and the connections we can help families make with schools. And actually a district in California, they had some high school students do outreach to families. It was, in that specific example, a large Spanish-speaking community, and helped the parents' families navigate Gradebook, how to send an email and use the translate key, some of those things that we know have tremendous outcomes in academic and school experience that perhaps we assume our families know how to access and perhaps they don't. And so again, and I'm a big huge fan of student voice, it was students that did the outreach and it was really awesome to see.

**Cindy Carraway-Wilson:** Yes, absolutely. And there are some schools, we weren't able to get them here for this webinar unfortunately, but there are some schools that have students who create welcoming committees, who are actively engaged in making sure that everybody in the school, regardless of race, ethnicity, language spoken, sexual identity, gender identity are welcome. And they're really working hard to do that. And that's a wonderful example of positive youth development as well, right? So we're not just doing things to or for them, but we're doing things with our students, which is wonderful, which is another form of language, right? Because we're not all used to thinking and speaking that way, although it's becoming more common.

I think that we are just about out of time here. Is there anything that anybody would like to just add as one last moment comment, we have about a minute left, that's come to mind that we haven't asked you about? Okay. So I think that we are at time at this point. We're going to go ahead and bring up our slide again with the feedback form link so that we can have you all click the link, it'll go back into chat as well, and give us your feedback on this webinar. Let us know how we did. And please feel free to continue to ask your questions. Each of our speakers will get a copy so they'll know about your experience, but they'll also be able to understand what other kind of questions are outstanding and they will be able to respond or provide support. And some of our speakers have also provided their email addresses, which you'll see in the speaker bios.

I want to thank our speakers so much for spending your time with us today, we greatly appreciate the time you took and we appreciate your wisdom and

expertise that you brought into our space. Thank you to all of our audience members for all of your participation, for those icons coming up and for coming into our webinars. I hope you all have a wonderful rest of the day and we hope to see you at our next webinar. Take care.