

Belongingness and Faculty Retention in Independent Schools.

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Executive Summary

For our study, we partnered with the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) to explore how feelings of belonging influence independent school faculty retention. Previous research demonstrated that 30% of new teachers leave the profession in the first five years (Ronfeldt, et.al, 2013) and 25% of independent school teachers planned to leave their schools by the end of the 2021-22 school year (Steiner & Woo, 2021). Given these challenges faced by independent schools, we hoped to learn which factors influence retention and what leaders might do to foster school climates where teachers build and enjoy long-term careers.

Using the work of Maslow (1943) and Baumeister and Leary (2017), we examined how the need for connection and belongingness shaped the experiences of teachers in independent schools. We also tapped into Moos' (1987) theory of social climate which posits that the key to thriving in a certain context is the match between the person and the environment. Lastly, we considered how self-determination theory leads individuals to satisfy their psychological needs within the context of their work (Desi & Ryan, 2000).

We then developed three research questions based on our problem of practice, a review of the literature, and the theories listed above.

Research Questions

- How do feelings of belongingness influence teacher retention at independent schools?
- What characteristics of an independent school climate foster feelings of belonging within independent school faculty?
- What can independent schools do to increase belongingness outcomes amongst faculty?

To arrive at the answers to these questions, we designed a survey which included portions of three scales: the workplace belongingness scale (Paton, 2010), an adapted version of the work-environment scale (Friis, 1981), and components of the work-related basic needs satisfaction scale (Broeck, et al., 2010). We included demographic questions and three open-ended questions. NAIS distributed this survey to a sample of NAIS members with over 800 educators completing the survey in its entirety.

For the analysis of close-ended responses, we focused on descriptive statistics, correlations, and regression analysis. For the open-ended responses, we coded comments using both inductive and deductive codes. From this analysis, we arrived at three findings and recommendations.

Research Findings

1. The top three factors contributing to feelings of belongingness were social connections, support, and recognition.
2. Feelings of belongingness strongly influenced faculty decisions to remain at a school.
3. Relationships with colleagues and others within the school community increase feelings of belongingness for independent school faculty.
4. Relationships with school leaders have an outsized impact on the workplace climate.

Recommendations

1. Prioritize Belongingness as a Component of School Climate
 - a. Diagnose a belongingness baseline.
 - b. Conduct a professional development audit with a lens toward belonging.
 - c. Assess the importance of demographic factors and their influence on belonging.
2. Foster Relationships Amongst Colleagues in Independent Schools
 - a. Designate spaces for collaboration, such as shared offices and spaces for informal faculty interaction.
 - b. Schedule time for collaboration and conversation.
 - c. Facilitate teambuilding activities and informal collaboration among faculty.
3. Invest in Leadership Development
 - a. Provide access to communication workshops and professional development.
 - b. Support school leaders in their aptitude in giving and receiving feedback.
 - c. Provide coaching and mentoring to leaders.

Introduction

Organizational Context

The National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) is a nonprofit membership organization that promotes public advocacy of independent school education (NAIS, n.d.). Based in Washington, DC, NAIS serves private schools in the United States and abroad by providing education, training, networking, job resources, and research to independent school professionals. Across the United States, NAIS supports over 1,600 member institutions. It defines independent schools as “nonprofit, private schools that are independent in philosophy: each is driven by a unique mission and governed by an independent board of trustees where tuition payments and charitable contributions are the primary drivers of finances.” (NAIS, n.d.) In addition to these attributes, there are “four key freedoms” (Rush and Gilmore, 2012, p. 14) that independent schools possess which differentiate them from all other types of schools. They are:

- “The ability to define their mission;
- The freedom to regulate admission;
- The autonomy to define teacher credentials;
- The freedom to teach what the school deems important, including freedom from state curricula, textbooks, and test mandates such as end of grade tests and Annual Yearly Progress (AYP).” (Rush and Gilmore, 2012, p. 14).

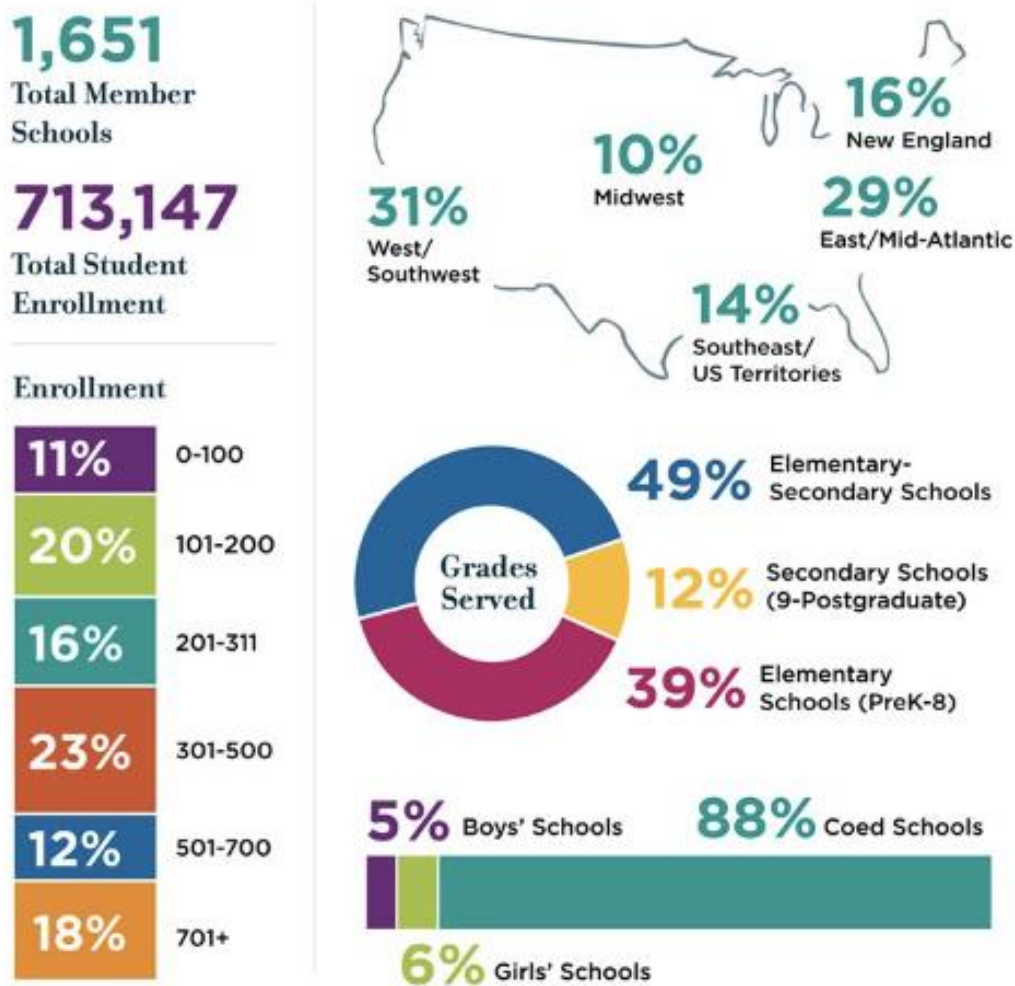
To support schools with such freedoms, NAIS adopted its current Vision, Mission, and Values in June 2019 to guide their collaboration with member institutions (Appendix A). In that statement, the organization shared its commitment to providing educators with resources to help learners find success at independent schools by embracing innovation and diversity. The values include:

- Thinking independently
- Leading change
- Embracing diversity
- Championing inclusivity
- Empowering community (NAIS, 2019).

Led by President Debra P. Wilson and governed by a board of directors, the staff of NAIS is composed of researchers, writers, media professionals, and operational personnel in support of the employees and trustees of independent schools. In addition, NAIS has a professional volunteer network of independent school educators who extend their mission within their own markets. For conferences hosted by NAIS, independent school educators present workshops and keynote speakers share their expertise within the field. Resources provided by and research conducted by NAIS cover both teaching and learning for classroom educators, as well as depth of insights for administrative leaders, heads of school, and professionals who manage admissions, development, finance, and operations within this industry. As professionals within the field of

independent school education, we collaborated with NAIS to support member schools to understand how school climates contribute to feelings of belongingness among teachers and whether those feelings of belongingness affect teacher retention.

Figure 1. NAIS 2022 membership demographics (NAIS, 2022)



Significance of the Problem of Practice

Teacher retention is of critical importance across all fields of education, as teacher shortages plague our schools post-pandemic (Steiner & Woo, 2021). In addition to the monetary costs of teacher turnover, student achievement is directly tied to teacher retention (Ronfelt, Loeb, and Wyckoff, 2013, p. 8). Even before the pandemic, beginning teachers were leaving their schools and the teaching profession at an alarming rate (Brill and McCartney, 2008, p. 750). According to the American Educational Research Journal, across the nation, 30% of new teachers leave the profession within five years (Ronfeldt, et.al, 2013, p. 5). Independent schools are not

immune to these trends. According to a 2021 survey conducted by RAND Corporation, 25% of independent schoolteachers said they were likely to leave their jobs by the end of the 2020-21 school year, a significant increase from pre-pandemic rates (Steiner & Woo, 2021). NAIS has shared that “traditionally, schools tend to focus on improving salaries and benefits to retain faculty, but ultimately, teachers want their work to have meaning” (Torres, personal communication, August 16, 2022). To further explore this sentiment, NAIS has conducted teacher retention and teacher satisfaction surveys. Seeking to dive deeper, we collaborated with NAIS to learn whether meaningful work in the teaching profession could be born from feelings of belonging. Research clearly articulates the connection between belonging and retention across a variety of fields and experiences (Davis, et.al, 2019; Paton, 2010; Carr, et.al, 2019); yet, NAIS has not conducted a comprehensive survey to assess post-pandemic feelings of belongingness among teachers. Additionally, there is an absence of literature around these phenomena within the independent school domain.

Baumeister and Leary (2017) describe belongingness as the human desire for “lasting, positive and significant interpersonal relationships” (p. 497). They go on to share that this need to belong requires two elements, frequent interactions with another person and a relationship “marked by stability, affective concern and continuation into the foreseeable future” (Baumeister and Leary, 2017, p. 500). According to Brill and McCartney (2008), mentoring and induction programs are mutually beneficial to both new and veteran teachers because they allow them to “expand upon their teaching skills and develop new ones” (p. 767), while also providing the emotional support necessary to retain both sets of teachers. Moreover, faculty belonging positively affects the students in these teachers’ classrooms, especially among new teachers (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Students ultimately benefit from the consistency of teachers and adults in their lives. According to the Learning Policy Institute, “high teacher turnover rates in schools negatively impact student achievement for all the students in a school, not just those in a new teacher’s classroom” (Sutcher, et al., 2016). In studying the factors that lead to this sense of belonging, our goal has been to help NAIS provide valuable insight to its member schools as they seek to foster communities of belonging, yield higher rates of teacher retention, and positively impact student achievement.

Research from Byrk and Schneider (2002) “provides evidence that staff cohesion and community are related to student engagement and achievement” (Ronfeldt, et.al, 2013, p. 7). By their very nature, independent schools are conducive spaces for cultivating communities of belonging. As small, mission-driven organizations, they are uniquely positioned to leverage their resources to yield better retention outcomes, and yet, independent schools are still experiencing significant faculty attrition. In their August 2022 faculty and staff turnover snapshot, NAIS reported that 20% of schools began the academic year with unfilled positions and 54% of schools filled more jobs for the current academic year compared to the previous year (NAIS, 2022).

The goal with our capstone work has been to allow NAIS to extend its current insights to include additional metrics around belonging, school climate, and retention. From our research and observations, we have learned which characteristics of schools and their communities contribute

to belonging, as well as which factors detract from it. Additionally, our study has uncovered those areas where there are gaps in the system that neither contribute to nor detract from belonging. By understanding factors that simply sustain the status quo, we have been able to assess opportunities for possible growth. As an organization in support of independent school faculty, administrators, students, and trustees, NAIS shares that what “distinguishes independent schools from other types of schools is what happens in the classroom. It is not only the academics, but also the relationship between adults (mainly faculty) and students. Attracting, hiring, and retaining talented teachers is crucial to advance the mission of our schools and to contribute to the long-term sustainability of an independent school education” (Torres, personal communication, August 16, 2022).

Project Questions

Through an assessment of the problem of practice, literature review, and conceptual framework, we developed the following research questions to guide our study. These questions emerged from an interest in providing new insights to NAIS as well as assessing any connections between independent school climate and belongingness.

1. How do feelings of belongingness influence teacher retention at independent schools?
2. What characteristics of an independent school climate foster feelings of belonging within independent school faculty?
3. What can independent schools do to increase belongingness outcomes amongst faculty?

Literature Review

Our initial review of the literature considered belongingness in the workplace and social climate to broadly understand characteristics that have contributed to employee satisfaction and retention in a variety of industries. We also reviewed research specific to teacher satisfaction and retention to better understand the landscape of the teaching profession and the characteristics that have shaped the lifecycle of a teacher from pre-service to attrition. Through this process, we observed an absence of literature related to faculty belongingness and retention within independent schools. Our study aims to fill this gap.

Belongingness in the Workplace

Belongingness can be measured in a myriad of contexts, and studies on belongingness have been conducted in a variety of workplaces, but none have focused on faculty and employee belonging in independent schools. Within the field of belongingness studies, Paton’s 2010 study on nurses stands out for its emphasis on how belongingness is defined and how leadership affects these feelings. For Paton (2010), belongingness is a “feeling of happiness and a sense of family” (p. IV). She assigned the responsibility for creating a culture of belongingness to nurse

leaders within a hospital and found that developing a sense of belonging among nurses is particularly important for novice nurses. There were three central questions within Paton's 2010 study.

1. "What is a nurse's understanding of the term belongingness?"
2. How could a nurse leader use the concept of belongingness in developing caring and supportive work environments?
3. How could belongingness influence job satisfaction and retention of nurses?" (Paton, 2010, p. 16).

Within this study, Paton (2010) found that 100% of the nurses believed that the responsibility for creating a culture of belongingness resided in leadership and the organization itself.

In a study focused more on organizational culture, Gkorezis et al. (2013) studied the role of belongingness as a mediator in the relationship between workplace incivility and employee thriving. Gkorezis et al. (2013) concluded that workplace incivility increased thoughts of employees wanting to leave a job; however, feelings of belongingness within an organization moderated these experiences and helped with the retention of employees. Thus, feelings of belongingness facilitate not only job satisfaction, but also moderate negative experiences in the workplace.

Teacher Recruitment, Retention, Attrition Costs

Teachers enter the profession for a variety of reasons including benefits, salary, and commitment to helping students. However, once immersed in the profession, there is an ongoing reassessment of these benefits that requires institutions to consider the working conditions they provide to teachers. A 2012 study of teacher retention in public schools found that "turnover, migrating to another school or leaving the teaching profession, is greater among teachers than other professions" (Hughes, 2012, p. 245). In a separate study, Ingersoll and Smith (2003) shared that the staffing problems in public schools cannot be explained only by teacher retirement and increased student enrollments; rather, organizational characteristics also contribute to the problem of teacher retention (Ingersoll, 2001; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003).

In a related study, the National Center for Education Statistics investigated private school teacher turnover in 2005. It found that teachers who left their school or profession were more likely to report low levels of administrative support, low levels of satisfaction with salary, low levels of student discipline, and low levels of teacher input into classroom and school decisions (McGrath and Princiotta, 2005). A more recent study by the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS, n.d.) reinforced many of these outcomes in their Teachers' Jobs to be Done analysis of what motivates teacher retention. NAIS found teachers who stay in the independent school profession want to have a meaningful impact on students, feel trusted and respected, and

have support from leadership to best balance their work and life. Additionally, a Norwegian study produced by Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2011) cited the ongoing shortage of well-qualified teachers as an issue in many countries throughout the world. Their study found that in Norwegian schools, teachers' feelings of value consonance, as well as supervisory support and positive relations with colleagues and parents, were predictive of belonging, whereas time pressure and discipline problems were predictive of emotional exhaustion. They specifically looked at school-based, situational factors in their review, but also noted that personal and overarching professional factors may have contributed to teacher attrition. Our exploration of belonging and school climate aims to shape the guidance NAIS provides to school leaders so they might better understand teacher motivation and drivers of retention.

In the U.S., Ingersoll's (2011) seminal research out of the University of Pennsylvania focused on the lifecycle of teaching as a job from pre-employment through retirement. This study examined job satisfaction in teachers and provided a critical review of research to assess variables within school environments that have yielded higher satisfaction and, therefore, retention within schools and the teaching profession. The analysis considered relationships teachers formed within their communities as one such variable affecting satisfaction and retention. Ingersoll (2011) also cited the importance of induction and mentoring in the onboarding of new teachers and their longevity and commitment to the teaching profession. His extensive research is cited in many other teacher retention studies and has provided a framework from which we constructed our own exploration of retention among independent school teachers.

Research from Brill and McCartney (2008) and Ronfeldt, Loeb, and Wykoff (2013) complement Ingersoll's ongoing research with an assessment of the costs associated with teacher attrition. Ronfeldt, Loeb, and Wykoff (2013) have suggested that "these costs drain resources that might otherwise be spent on program improvement or working conditions" (p. 8). In addition to the economic costs, Brill and McCartney (2008) described institutional costs due to the disruption of the community (p. 752). Citing Ingersoll (2003), Brill & McCartney shared the importance of a positive sense of community, belongingness, and strong communication among teachers as indicators of effective schools (Brill and McCartney, 2008, p. 752). In sharing insight into how teacher turnover has harmed student achievement, Ronfeldt et.al (2013) wrote "where turnover is considered to have a disruptive organizational influence, all members of a school community are vulnerable, including staying teachers and their students" (p. 7). In addition, Brill and McCartney (2008) highlighted the instructional costs and impact on student performance, finding that "teacher retention is thus directly tied to the collective experience of teachers in the school and the quality of instruction that students receive" (p. 754). The many costs associated with teacher attrition have been a driver in our study to determine whether there is any correlation between belonging and faculty retention. Our insights should provide additional opportunities for interventions that school leaders can deploy to limit costly turnover.

Measuring Belongingness

Codifying and measuring belongingness has long been a challenging endeavor due to the myriad of ways in which individuals and scholars define the concept. According to Allen et al., “most belonging measures are unidimensional, subjective, and static, representing a snapshot of a person’s perception at the time of administration” (2021, p.90). In other words, these measures do not capture the full picture of belongingness.

Walton’s (2014) measure of state-based belonging captured the transitory nature of feelings when they are detached from a specific situation. Belongingness can ebb and flow throughout the course of a day, week, month or year if it is not measured in connection to a specific person, place, or group (Trampe et al., 2015). Ignoring the context in which a person responds affirmatively or negatively to questions about belongingness could skew the data on the degree to which educators experience belongingness in their schools.

In their 2018 study, Jena and Pradhan identified and validated a workplace-specific belongingness scale, which emphasized the importance of context when measuring belongingness. The researchers employed a 12-item scale of workplace belongingness that specifically measured the feelings of belongingness at work. They proposed that this instrument could improve the understanding of belongingness within the context of a person’s employment as distinguished from a more general feeling of belongingness in life.

Researchers Al-Atwi and Al-Hassani (2021) also developed a psychometrically sound measure of inclusive leadership that could be used to research the impact of leadership on belongingness. This scale has been able to show that inclusive leadership is related to employee feelings of belongingness. As we developed our own measures of belongingness among educators, we considered the types of questions and prompts that might elicit multidimensional and dynamic feedback about belongingness in schools.

Conceptual Framework

To anchor our research on belongingness among independent school educators, we utilized a conceptual framework built upon belongingness theory. We further bolstered this framework by including connections to social climate theory and self-determination theory. These three theories served as a lens for us to analyze our research. Belongingness theory guided our understanding of the feelings and connections that respondents had at their schools, social climate theory helped us to understand the context within which each teacher worked, and self-determination theory shaped our understanding of the motivations teachers had for remaining at or leaving their schools.

Belongingness Theory

The human need for belongingness has been around since prehistoric times when humans depended upon one another to keep safe and well-fed. While individuals might not have been consciously seeking to satisfy their need for belongingness, it certainly came as a necessity for attaining food and shelter. Thus, belonging to a group, regardless of the sense of friendship or intimacy among the individuals, ensured one's basic needs were met. However, Maslow (1943) argued in his seminal work, "A Theory of Human Motivation," that the desire for belongingness came after one had satisfied their basic physiological and safety needs. The need to belong would then emerge as a necessity for being a healthy person, and that belongingness would develop as a result of building meaningful relationships.

Figure 2. Maslow's hierarchy of needs. (Plateresca, Getty Images, 2023)



In their own studies on the topic, Baumeister and Leary (2017) described belongingness as the human drive for "lasting, positive and significant interpersonal relationships" (p. 497). According to the researchers, to achieve belonging, humans need frequent, positive interactions with others and a relationship "marked by stability, affective concern and continuation into the foreseeable future" (Baumeister and Leary, 2017, p. 500). Consequently, much of human behavior has been in service of satisfying a need to belong. What's more, the researchers suggested that "belongingness can be almost as compelling [as] a need [for] food" (p. 498), thus making it essential to human survival, much like it has been throughout history.

In fact, individuals possess a "certain minimum quantity and quality of social contacts" (Baumeister and Leary, 2017, p. 500) in order to attain this sense of belonging. Once a person has satisfied this minimum number, their motivation to belong will lessen, and they will continue climbing up the hierarchy of needs. However, if feelings of belongingness are disrupted by the loss of a relationship that relationship will need to be replaced in order to maintain a sense of belonging. If it is not, the lack of belongingness can lead to a number of negative effects ranging

from a minimum of disengaging from work to more extreme mental health crises (Baumeister and Leary, 2017, p. 520).

As it relates to teacher retention in independent schools, a lack of belonging can lead educators to seek connections elsewhere to satisfy this need, such as searching for a new school or a new profession all together. In our work, we have studied which characteristics of a school environment contribute to positive relationships as well as a stable and caring work climate. At the conclusion of our study, we will make recommendations to NAIS and its member schools about how they might further foster belongingness and improve teacher retention based on our examination of these features.

Social Climate Theory

Moos' (1987) theory of social climate asks the question, "What are the underlying characteristics of social settings and how can they be measured?" (p. 231). The theory links environmental systems with individual adaptation to that system along with a consideration of how that individual perceives their environment and is able to cope within it. Moos (1987) has suggested that the key to thriving in a particular context is the match between the person and the environment. Different types of people respond positively to different types of contexts. Four types of work climate are associated with higher stress levels for employees, "high job demands, supervisor control, insufficient opportunity to participate in decision making, and lack of clarity about the job and criteria for adequate performance" (Moos, 1987, p. 235). In addition, the level of employee competence is associated with the need for challenge and structure in the environment. "More competent employees typically need more challenge and freedom, while those who are less competent need more structure and reward" (Moos, 1987, p. 235). Overall, when independence and initiative are valued at work, employee performance increases along with personal competence. (Moos, 1987)

To assess social climate, Moos (1984) developed a set of Social Climate Scales, including the Work Environment Scale, which measures three dimensions of an employee's experience with their workplace including relationship dimensions, personal growth or goal orientation dimensions, and system maintenance and change dimensions (p. 8). His ongoing work in applying Social Climate scales to education, healthcare, and child development "affirm the value of examining the interplay of relationship, personal growth, and system maintenance factors in searching out the consequences of varying social climates" (Moos, 1984, p. 11). For example, through his application of the Classroom Environment Scale, Moos (1978) found that "classrooms must be intellectually challenging to encourage growth in achievement and understanding as well as cohesive and satisfying to encourage student interest and motivation" (Moos, 1978, p. 263). With these findings in mind, we considered the ways in which relationships, growth opportunities, and systems fostered climate at independent schools. Using this lens, we examined belonging for faculty members at independent schools and how social climate has influenced belonging.

Moos (1984) further considered the determinants of social climate and addressed how “physical, policy, and suprapersonal factors affect each other and the stress and resource characteristics of the social environment” (p. 11). Through our assessment of belonging, we considered how each of these factors moderated the social climate and influenced an individual faculty member’s sense of belonging. Moos (1996) importantly shared that “one key reason to assess and understand environments is to monitor and improve them” (p. 200). Further, he suggested “it [was] possible to assess a social environment, to provide feedback to the participants about the characteristics of their milieu, to engage and motivate them to change the social milieu in directions they themselves desire, and to monitor and evaluate the results of the change process” (Moos, 1978, p. 268). Ultimately, we provided findings to school leaders to help them better understand how social climates develop and what role they may play in shaping them to cultivate feelings of belonging within their schools.

Table 1. Moos’ Work Environment Scale (Moos, 1984).

<u>Relationship dimensions</u>	
1. Involvement	The extent to which employees are concerned and committed to their job
2. Peer cohesion	How friendly and supportive employees are to each other
3. Supervisor support	The extent to which management is supportive of employees and encourages employees to be supportive of each other
<u>Personal growth or goal orientation dimensions</u>	
4. Autonomy	How much employees are encouraged to be self-sufficient and to make their own decisions
5. Task orientation	The emphasis on good planning, efficiency and getting the job done
6. Work pressure	The degree to which the press of work and time urgency dominate the job milieu
<u>System maintenance and change dimensions</u>	
7. Clarity	The extent to which employees know what to expect in their daily routine and how explicitly rules and policies are communicated
8. Control	How much management uses rules and pressures to keep employees under control
9. Innovation	The emphasis on variety, change, and new approaches
10. Physical comfort	The extent to which the physical surroundings contribute to a pleasant work environment

Self-Determination Theory

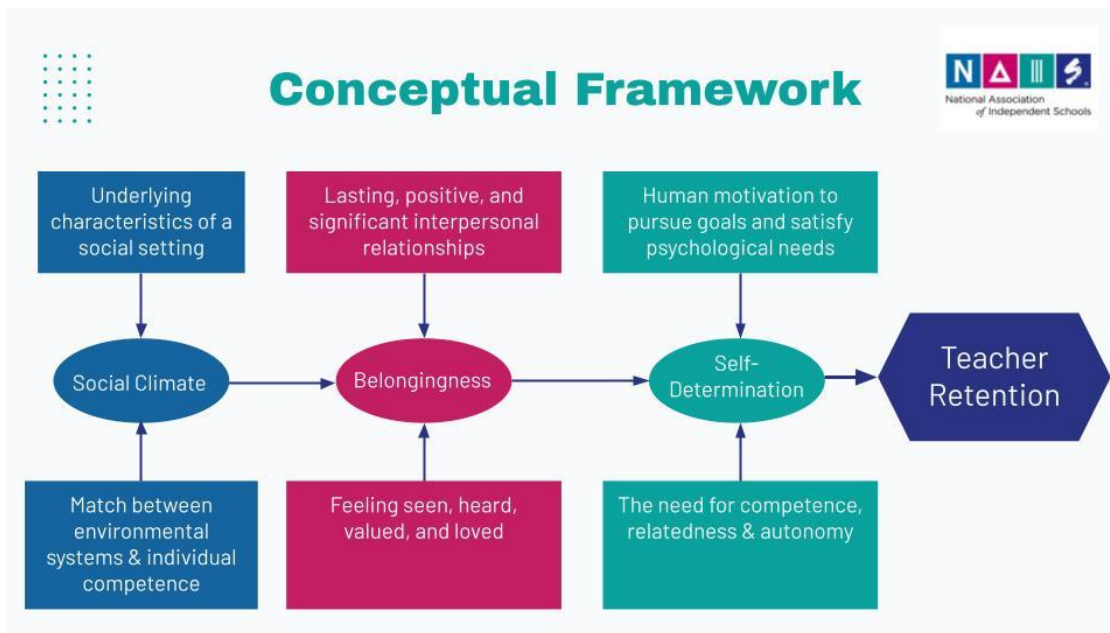
In contrast to the previous theories which focused on how external factors affect belongingness, self-determination theory (SDT) is the study of human motivation and the factors that lead people to pursue their goals. Behind this motivation lies a desire for individuals to satisfy their psychological needs. In particular, people have a need for competence, relatedness, and autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 2000). SDT scholars Ryan and Deci (2017) define competence as a basic need to feel “effectance and mastery” (p. 11) and relatedness as a feeling of being “socially connected... [and] cared for by others” (p. 11). Relatedness includes belongingness and “feeling significant among others” (p. 11). Finally, according to Ryan and Deci (2017), autonomy involves feeling that one is in control of his/her/their choices, can make them voluntarily, and those choices are “congruent with one’s authentic interests and values” (p. 10). The three elements of this theory provide a framework for how individuals perceive and experience belongingness within a workplace.

Corkin, et al. (2018) adapted the motivation theory contained within SDT to look at teacher motivation in schools. In particular, they looked at school environments that support autonomy and promote intrinsic motivation for teachers. Their findings supported the use of SDT to “understand intrinsic work motivation within school contexts” (Corkin, et al., 2018, p. 61). They found that the more autonomy teachers felt from their leaders, the greater their self-efficacy for teaching. Maryam, et al. (2020) studied teacher turnover intentions through the lens of self-determination theory. They found that teachers’ feelings of competence and autonomy negatively correlated with their turnover intentions. Finally, Eyal and Roth (2010) found that “autonomously motivated teachers perceive their engagement in various teaching tasks as interesting and meaningful” and as a result, they “experience[d] less exhaustion than other teachers” (p. 268). The reduction in those feelings of exhaustion in turn led to a reduction in burnout. These studies suggest that self-determination theory can provide a lens for our research into teacher retention and the contexts and motivations that encourage teachers to stay at their schools.

Conceptual Framework Process Map

Woven together in the process map below, these concepts demonstrate the extent to which school setting and workplace relationships affect one's sense of belonging and thus their inclination to remain at a school or to leave.

Figure 3. Conceptual framework.



(Moo, 1984; Maslow; 1943; Deci & Ryan, 2000)

We anchored our research using three theoretical frames: social climate theory, belongingness theory and self determination theory. These three theories served as a lens for us to analyze our research. Belongingness theory guided our understanding of the feelings and connections that respondents experienced at their schools, social climate theory helped us to understand the context within which each teacher worked, and self determination theory shaped our understanding behind the motivations teachers had for remaining at or leaving their schools, leading ultimately to an understanding of teacher retention.

Moo's (1984) Social Climate Theory posits that the underlying characteristics of a social setting along with the match between the individual and the context of their environmental systems leads to a work environment that is conducive to fostering feelings of belonging. In turn, when teachers can create lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships, and they feel seen, heard, valued, and loved (Vidale, 2021), they feel they belong (Maslow, 1943). We theorized that a positive social climate coupled with strong feelings of belonging would motivate teachers to pursue goals and satisfy their need for competence, relatedness, and autonomy, which would lead to teacher retention.

Study Design and Methodology

Survey Design

Our conceptual framework of belongingness encompasses the theories laid out above and provides the lens through which we designed our survey and examined the data collected from it. The concepts listed in Table 2 align directly with each part of the survey.

Table 2. Conceptual framework.

Concept	Definition	Survey Element	Project Question
Belongingness	The human drive for “lasting, positive and significant interpersonal relationships” (Baumeister and Leary, 2017, p. 497). Feeling “seen, heard, valued, and loved” (Vidale, 2021).	Workplace Belongingness Scale Questions	How do feelings of belongingness influence teacher retention at independent schools?
Social Climate	The underlying characteristics of social settings and how they can be measured. The theory links environmental systems with individual adaptation to that system along with how that individual perceives their environment and is able to cope with it. (Moos, 1984)	Work-Environment Scale Questions	What characteristics of an independent school climate foster feelings of belonging within independent school faculty?
Self Determination	The study of human motivation and the factors that lead people to pursue their goals and satisfy their psychological needs. (Deci & Ryan citation here)	Work-Related Basic Needs Satisfaction Scale Question	What can independent schools do to increase belongingness outcomes amongst faculty?
Retention	How factors such as school characteristics and teacher demographics affect whether teachers stay in their schools, move to different schools, or leave the profession before retirement.	Open-Ended Questions	All questions

The survey included questions from the Workplace Belongingness Scale (Jenna & Pradhan, 2017) (Appendix B). It used the entirety of the scale items to create a singular belongingness score. All items were scored on a five-point Likert-type measure from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Statements included: “I am able to work in this school without sacrificing my

principles” and “My personal needs are well met by this school.” The survey also included an adapted version of the Work Environment Scale (WES-10) (Friis, 1981). This instrument included ten questions scored on a five-point Likert-type measure ranging from “to a small extent” to “to a very large extent.” We asked the following questions: “Does what you do at school give you a chance to see how good your abilities really are?” and “To what extent do you find that you can use yourself, your knowledge and experience in the work at your school?” Per the request of our partner organization, one item in the Workplace Environment Scale was changed from *Does what you do at school give you a chance to see how good your abilities really are?* to *To what extent does what you do at school give you a chance to see how good your abilities really are?* Given that this was only a minor grammatical change, the validity of the instrument was not impacted.

To assess motivation and self determination, statements were drawn from the Work-Related Basic Need Satisfaction scale (Broeck et. al, 2010). These statements included “At work I feel part of a group,” and “The tasks I have to do at work are in line with what I really want to do.” These were also scored using a Likert-type measure ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Demographic questions were sourced from the NAIS/DASL Faculty and Staff Satisfaction Survey (Torres, personal communication, 2023) and additional individual demographic responses. Finally, the survey included three open-ended questions which are listed below.

- In what ways does your school make you feel like you belong (or not belong)?
- When you consider signing a contract for another year, how does your sense of belonging at your school impact that decision making process?
- Is there anything else you think we should know about your work environment?

While we realize there are quantitative ways to measure belonging, such as the Belongingness Scale included in our survey, we also recognize the feelings associated with belonging may be more challenging to quantify. By including qualitative open-ended questions, we hoped to glean insight from respondents that could add color to our understanding. Moreover, we felt a mixed methods survey would provide richer data that could offer more valuable insights for independent school leaders. According to Patton (2002), varying the methodological approach to survey data has been found to be valuable. “A general though by no means universal consensus has emerged that mixing methods can be both appropriate and rigorous” (Patton, 2002, p. 273).

The chart below details how each part of the survey mapped onto our research questions and the data sought to answer those questions.

Table 3. Data analysis map.

Research Question	Data Needed	Collection Instrument	Data Analysis
How do feelings of belongingness influence teacher retention at independent schools?	Indicators and descriptions from teachers about the degree to which they feel like they belong; teacher descriptions of retention decision-making processes	Belongingness Scale, Work-Related Basic Needs Questions, Open-Ended Questions	Run both descriptive and inferential statistics on the data set. Comparing insights from inferential statistics, assess whether there is a correlation between higher levels of belonging and teacher retention. Code and analyze qualitative feedback via open-ended responses for additional insight into how belonging influences retention.
What characteristics of an independent school climate foster feelings of belonging within independent school faculty?	Positive indicators from teachers about their school environment; teacher observations of organizational ways of inducing belongingness	Work Environment Scale, Work-Related Basic Needs Questions, Open-Ended Questions	Run both descriptive and inferential statistics on the data set. Comparing insights from inferential statistics, assess whether there is a correlation between higher levels of belonging and teacher retention. Code and analyze qualitative feedback via open-ended responses for additional insight into how belonging influences retention.
What can independent schools do to increase belongingness outcomes amongst faculty?	Descriptions from teachers about how schools attract and retain teachers, and facilitate belongingness	Open-Ended Questions	Assess recommendations for independent school leaders drawn from survey findings and existing generalizable research. Code and analyze qualitative feedback via open-ended responses for additional insight into how belonging influences retention.

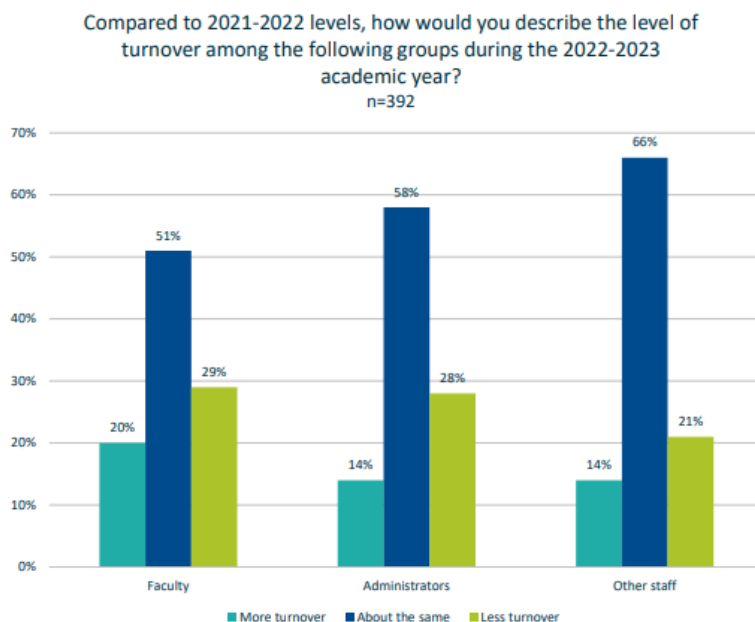
To reach teachers who could answer these questions and provide insight to guide recommendations for independent school leaders, we collaborated with Amada Torres, Vice-President for Studies, Insights, and Research at the National Association of Independent Schools. Through her access to teacher listservs and demographic databases, we contacted 5,336 teachers for this project.

Organization Selection

We partnered with NAIS because of its mission “to co-[create] the future of education by uniting and empowering [the independent school] community... through research, creation and curation of resources, and direct collaboration with education leaders” (NAIS, 2023). With this goal in mind, we felt that the organization was a natural match for a study on belongingness and teacher retention within independent schools. NAIS has 1651 member schools that include 61,625 teachers (NAIS, 2021-22). The ability to reach a large volume of teachers provided the best opportunity to analyze feedback from a diverse group of educators with varied experiences (Appendix C).

In “Why do teachers select independent schools” (NAIS, n.d.), NAIS has produced strong foundational research exploring teacher motivation for joining independent schools and providing independent school leaders insight into creating effective hiring practices. Additionally, NAIS provides biannual snapshot surveys to assess faculty and staff turnover (NAIS, n.d.). These quantitative findings demonstrate ongoing turnover across independent schools as reported by school leadership. Our intention was to build on these insights by investigating which factors most influence teachers and their experiences at independent schools.

Figure 4. NAIS 2022-2023 faculty turnover snapshot (NAIS, 2023).



Participants and Sampling Strategy

The participants in this study included faculty from independent schools across the United States. NAIS created a sample based on the types of schools where these teachers worked to best represent the independent school teacher population. For data collection and analysis, the teacher served as the unit of analysis.

NAIS employed this sampling strategy to ensure representation among the respondents. The sample population was based on a quota of demographics that matched current member schools, including school size, region, gender, and grade levels (Appendix D). This was a voluntary sample, as teachers were able to choose whether to complete the survey. One of the limitations of this project was the inability to contact all 60,000+ teachers. The sample did not account for differences in individual identities, presenting a second limitation. By distributing it among teachers with diverse school experiences, we were able to utilize this information in our data analysis to determine whether school characteristics affect the workplace environment, belongingness, and teacher retention.

While we were unable to create a sample of teachers based on their individual identities, their schools' demographics provided information on how work environments correlated with teacher responses to the survey. Furthermore, this limitation became an opportunity because it provided us with information about which schools foster belongingness and can retain teachers based on their work environment.

Data Collection

Survey of Independent School Faculty Members

RQ1: How do feelings of belongingness influence teacher retention at independent schools?

RQ2: What characteristics of an independent school climate foster feelings of belonging within independent school faculty?

To address our first and second research questions, in partnership with NAIS, we conducted a confidential survey on faculty belongingness that included school and individual demographic data collection, Likert scales, and open-ended questions. The purpose of our survey was to assess whether belonging influenced teacher retention and to evaluate characteristics of an independent school that foster feelings of belonging. Our survey included five demographic questions, two ranking questions, 29 Likert-scale quantitative questions, and three open-ended questions. We provided our questions to our lead contact at NAIS, Amada Torres, and the NAIS research team built our questions into a survey using their corporate SurveyMonkey tool.

NAIS distributed the survey to 5,336 teachers out of a possible 60,000+ teachers on March 16, 2023, using a unique link that was customized to capture the school demographic data of each individual respondent. NAIS used quota sampling to ensure the sample matched the

demographics of current members as much as possible with a maximum of five teachers per school. The data collected included region, school type, school grades, school gender, and school size (Torres, personal communication, March 28, 2023). After distribution, NAIS provided a link to a dashboard to track responses (Appendix E). NAIS sent a reminder on March 20, 2023, and March 28, 2023. The survey closed on March 31, 2023.

When the survey closed, NAIS provided a raw dataset in Excel format of 857 responses, representing a 15% response rate. Of the 857 respondents who began the survey distributed by NAIS, 34 respondents did not persist past the first question and were removed from the dataset, leaving 823 participants. An additional 262 individuals skipped at least one question in the survey. These individuals were excluded from any analysis for which they did not provide a response. In addition, 95 of those respondents did not complete the Belongingness Scale, these individuals were removed from any analysis related to this dependent variable. However, since qualitative data was collected from 73.6% (70) of these respondents, we did not want to eliminate them from the dataset. Table 4 lists the overall respondent school characteristics and Table 5 includes the overall individual respondent characteristics.

Table 4. Survey respondent school characteristics.

COED OR SINGLE SEX		SCHOOL LEVELS		SCHOOL TYPE	
Coed	89%	Elementary	36%	Boarding	1%
Girls	8%	Elementary-Secondary	45%	Boarding Day	16%
Boys	3%	Secondary	15%	Day	82%

SCHOOL REGION	
East (NJ, NY)	12%
Mid-Atlantic (DE, DC, MD, PA, VA)	18%
Midwest (IL, IN, IA, KY, MI, MN, MO, NE, ND, OH, SD, WV, WI)	10%
New England (CT, ME, MA, NH, RI, VT)	16%
Southeast (AL, FL, GA, MS, NC, SC, TN)	9%
Southwest (AZ, AR, CO, KS, LA, NM, OK, TX)	11%
US Territories (GU, PR, VI)	1%
West (AK, CA, HI, ID, MT, NV, OR, UT, WA, WY)	23%

SCHOOL SIZE	
Under 201	25%
201-300	12%
301-500	26%
501-700	14%
701+	24%

Table 5. Survey respondent individual characteristics.

RACE	
Asian	7%
Black or African American	8%
Middle Eastern	0%
Native American	0%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0%
Race Not Listed	4%
Race Unsure/Not Reported	2%
Two or More Races	7%
White	67%
No Response	3%
White	67%
Non-White	30%
No Response	3%

GENDER	
Male	22%
Female	74%
Non-binary	1%
No Response	3%

The respondent breakdown of white/non-white faculty members remained similar to the overall breakdown of independent school teachers who belong to NAIS. According to the NAIS DASL database, 32.8% of reported faculty in 2022-23 identified as people of color (NAIS, 2023). As we discuss in areas for further inquiry, consideration of race and other demographic characteristics is important for deeper understanding of belonging amongst independent school faculty.

Data Analysis

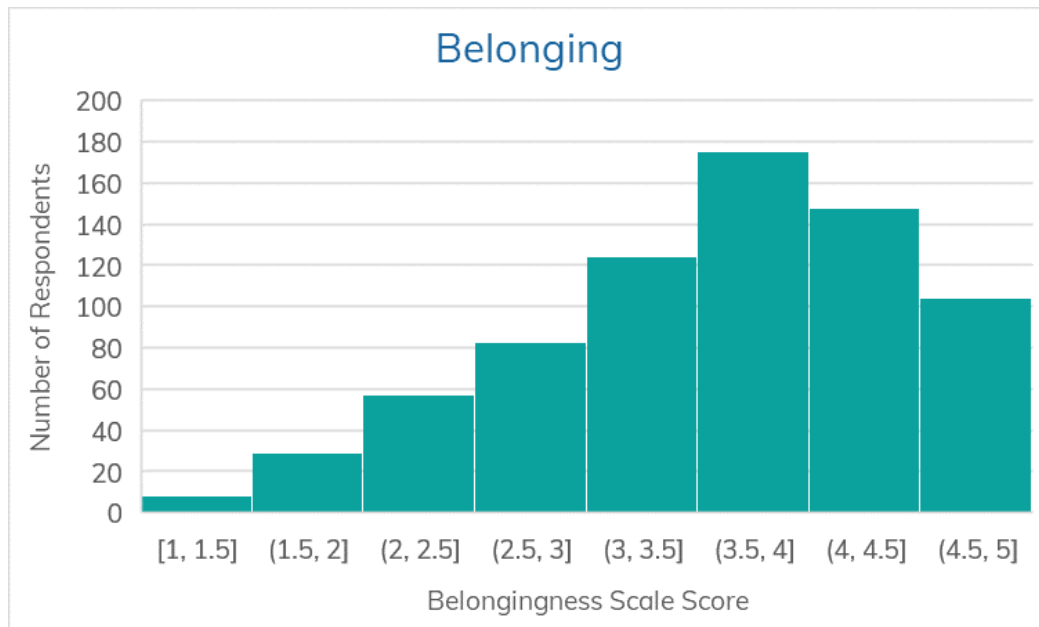
Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative Descriptive Statistics: Descriptive statistics including grand means, standard deviation, and sample variance are included in Appendix F. Analysis of responses focused on descriptive statistics, correlations, and regression analysis.

First, 728 respondents were assigned a belongingness score based on the average of their responses to the 12 questions from the Jana and Pradhan (2018) scale of belongingness. Figure 1

captures the belonging score amongst teachers we surveyed on a Likert scale from 1 to 5 where 1 represents strongly disagree and 5 represents strongly agree. The unconditional mean of 3.62 without any conditions placed on belonging falls between “neither agree nor disagree” and “somewhat agree.” However, 40% of respondents had a belongingness score between 4 and 5, falling between “somewhat agree” and “strongly agree.”

Figure 5. NAIS independent school teacher belonging score.



Then, using the Workplace Engagement Scale-10 (WES-10) (Friis, 1981), questions were divided into four subscales. The Self Realization subscale measured the extent to which staff members felt supported, whether they achieved more confidence, and if they experienced being able to use their knowledge working in the school. The workload subscale measured the number of tasks imposed on faculty and also the extent to which they felt they should have been in several places at the same time. The conflict subscale measured the extent to which faculty members experienced conflicts and loyalty problems among them. The nervousness subscale measured to what extent the faculty members were worried about going to work and to what extent they felt nervous or tense in their school. (Rossberg, Eiring, and Friis, 2004) The subscale scores are included in Appendix F.

Questions selected for workplace-related needs were not averaged into a singular score as they were not part of a validated scale and we found value in assessing each characteristic of workplace engagement in correlation to the belongingness score. A comprehensive overview of all Likert scale responses, mean, median, standard deviation, sample variance, and standard error is included in Appendix F.

Survey questions four and five asked respondents to consider the factors influencing their decision to stay at their school, and then rank the top factor. Figure 6 provides the overall counts for factors as they selected all possible factors. The “ability to impact students” was the most selected response. Figure 7 provides the distribution of the most important factor influencing respondents’ decision to remain at their school.

Figure 6. All factors influencing independent school teacher decision to remain at their school.

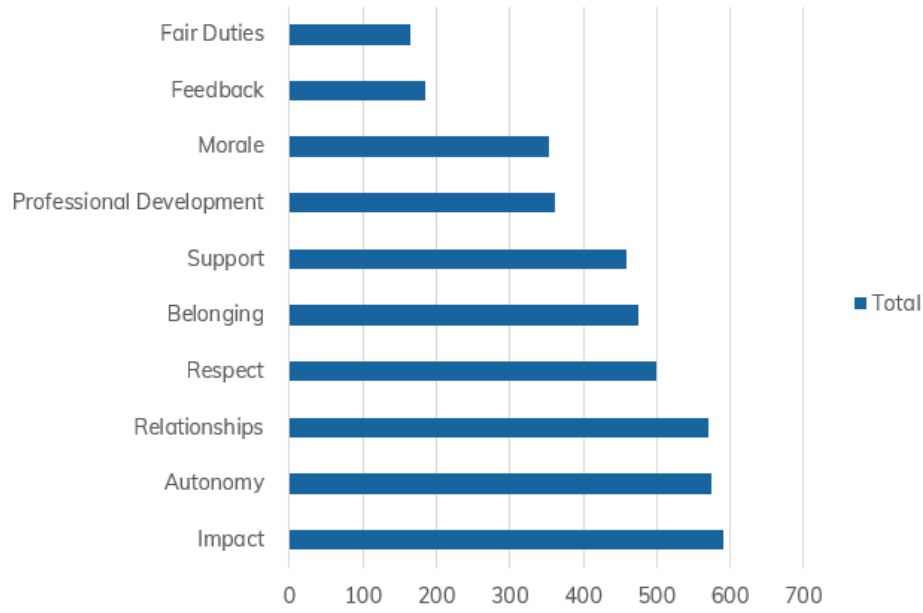
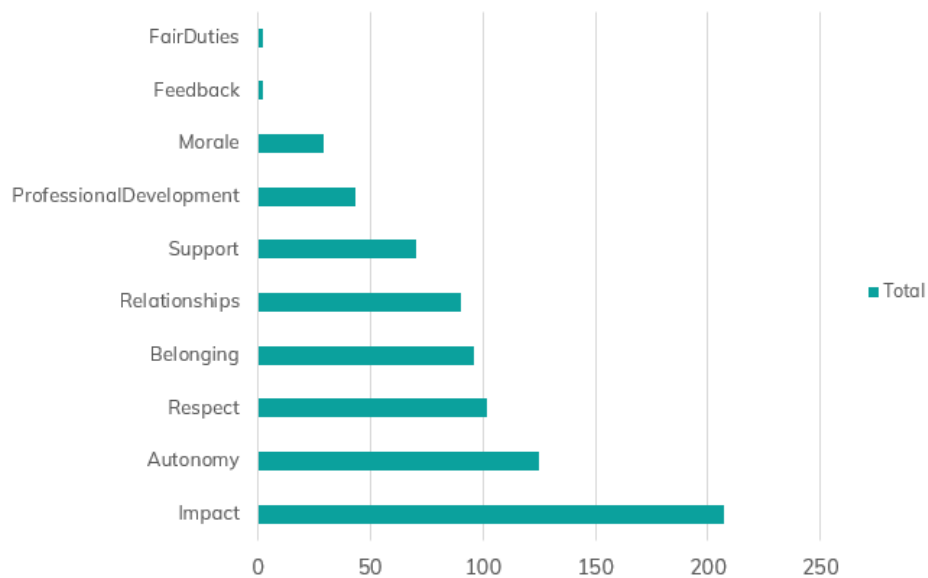


Figure 7. Top factor influencing independent school teacher decision to remain at their school.



We then calculated the conditional mean of belongingness using each factor as the dependent variable. Those who selected belonging as their top factor influencing their decision to remain at their school had the highest average belonging score across all factors at 3.88.

The conditional mean of belonging had minimal (within 0.2) variation based on school size, geographic region, and school characteristics. We believe this is a promising finding because all schools may benefit from recommendations, since they are all starting from nearly identical baselines.

To assess possible correlations between teacher retention and belonging as well as other variables, we turned to two survey questions regarding teachers' longevity: "I have been an employee at this school for" and "I plan to stay at my school for." Responses were recorded in ranges and then translated into numerical variables for quantitative analysis (Appendix H and Appendix I). There was no linear relationship ($r=0.06$) found between length of employment and belonging and a weak positive linear relationship ($r=0.22$) found between intended plan to stay and belonging (Appendix I). We then looked at the conditional means of belonging based on the "Planning to Stay" variable. Table 6 shows these conditional means. Respondents who planned to stay more than 5 years had a 0.85 higher average of belonging than those who did not plan to remain at their school. Thirty four percent of total respondents fell in this category, more than any other response.

Table 6. Plans to stay and conditional mean of belonging.

Planning to Stay	Average of Belonging
More than 5 years	3.83
1-3 years	3.67
Unsure	3.56
4-5 years	3.43
Do not wish to answer	3.32
Less than a year	3.20
I am not planning to remain at my school	2.98
Grand Total	3.62

We ran a nonlinear regression of belonging and planning to stay.

$$y = -0.0236x^2 + 0.3317x + 2.737$$

The R-squared indicated that 5% of the variation in the response variable could be explained by the predictor variables in the model.

To assess the influence of workplace environment on belonging and retention, we looked at any correlation between the belonging scale score and each of the workplace environment subscale scores. The self-realization subscale, which measured to what extent staff members felt

supported, whether they achieved more confidence and whether they experienced being able to use their knowledge working in the school, had a weak positive linear relationship to belonging.

Table 7: Correlation to belonging.

WES Subscale	Correlation to Belonging (r)
Self-realization	0.26
Workload	0.06
Conflict	-0.11
Nervousness	-0.16

We calculated conditional means of belonging for each scale and scored the Workplace-Related Needs questions of our survey. The conditional mean of belonging for those respondents who selected a 5 “strongly agree” for the following statements was higher than the unconditional mean of belonging:

1. My relationships within my school community, and the quality and longevity of those relationships, motivate me to remain at my school/renew my contract. (Relationships)
2. At work, I can talk with people about things that really matter to me (PeopleTalk)
3. Some people I work with are close friends of mine (Friends)

Table 8 provides a summary of conditional means of these responses compared to the unconditional mean of 3.62 for belongingness. All of these responses referred to questions dealing with relationships with colleagues and interactions with people at their school.

Table 8: Conditional means of belonging.

	Relationships	People Talk	Friends
1	2.69	1.93	2.57
2	3.13	2.64	3.22
3	3.36	3.30	3.70
4	3.88	3.95	3.96
5	4.23	4.64	4.50

We then calculated the correlation between these factors and belonging. Relationships was the only factor that had a weak, yet positive, linear relationship with belonging with a correlation of $r = .26$.

Table 9: Correlation to belonging.

Category	Correlation to Belonging (r)
Relationships	.26
People Talk	.18
Friends	.16

We then ran a multiple regression on these factors and belonging (Appendix J).

$$\text{Belonging} = 3.04 + 0.02* (\text{PeopleTalk}) + 0.03* (\text{Friends}) + 0.14* (\text{Relationships})$$

The coefficient of determination showed that 7% of variation in belonging could be explained by relationships, people to talk to, and friends within school climates. This data point demonstrated that the model was not a best fit for the data. Still, given that the p-value was less than 0.05, these values remain statistically significant.

Qualitative Data Analysis

To analyze the three open-ended questions on the survey (Appendix K), we imported the cleaned data set into the research software, Dedoose. For each question, we created a codebook that included both deductive and inductive codes (Appendix N contains full descriptions). The theories highlighted in the conceptual framework provided the deductive codes while the participant responses provided the inductive codes. Separate codes were used for each question. When examining the coded responses, we considered four descriptors- gender, race, length of employment at the school, and willingness to return. We chose race and gender to determine if there were nuanced differences in the ways in which respondents of different identities answered each question. We selected length of employment and a willingness to return because we wished to examine the correlation between belongingness and teacher retention.

The Dedoose software code-specific inter-rater reliability test was used to determine the interrater reliability between members of the team that coded open ended responses. Results were reported using Cohen's kappa statistic, which is a widely used and respected measure to evaluate inter-rater agreement based on the actual coding behavior of each rater as compared to the rate of agreement expected by chance. Landis and Koch (1977), suggest that kappa values of: < .20 = poor agreement, .21-.4 = fair agreement, .41-.6 = moderate agreement, .61-.8 = good agreement, and .81-1.0 = very good agreement. For the first question we received an inter-rater reliability of .48 which indicated a moderate agreement across coders.

Open-Ended Question 1.

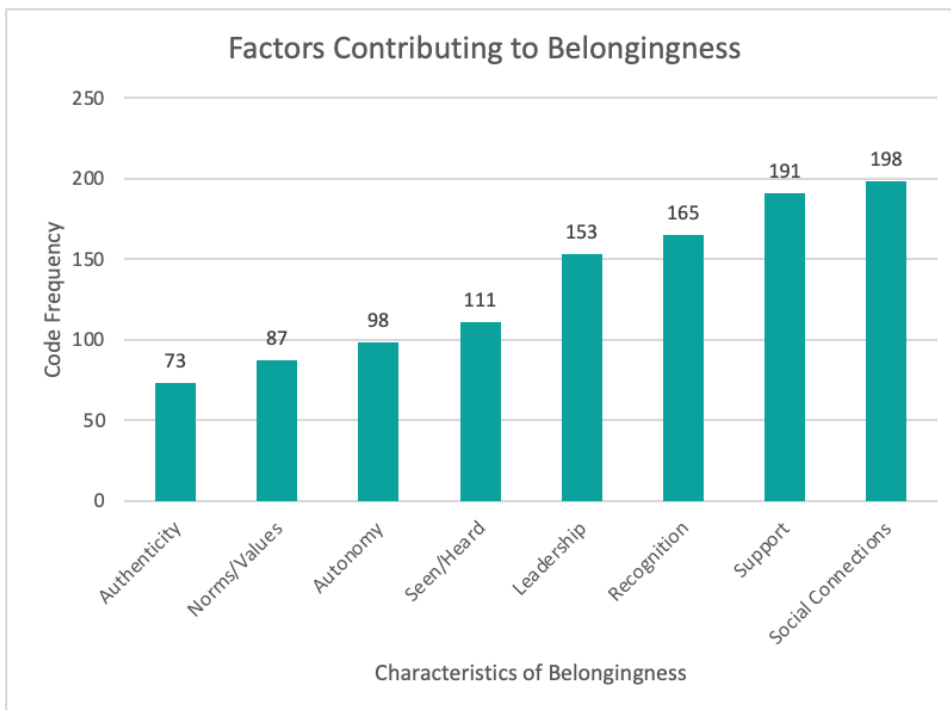
The first question, "In what ways does your school make you feel like you belong (or not belong)?" generated eight codes. The deductive codes included autonomy/decision making and social connections (including sub-codes of colleagues, students, administrators, and parents), both of which aligned with self determination theory; recognition, which, along with social connections, aligned with belongingness theory; and norms/values which aligned with social climate theory.

The inductive codes included authenticity, support, seen/heard, and leadership. To develop these codes, we read through responses several times to identify themes. Codes were

applied to a response regardless of whether it was mentioned in a positive or a negative manner. For example, if a respondent wrote about the quality of leadership as being positive or negative, it was coded for “leadership.”

Of the responses collected, the most frequently cited code was social connections (198) followed closely by support (191), then recognition (165) and leadership (153).

Figure 8. Factors contributing to belongingness.



This emphasis on social connections resonated with nearly all employees at a school regardless of their length of employment. Among those connections, relationships with colleagues ranked higher than those with any other constituents including students, parents, and administrators. The only group that did not list support or social connections as one of the top two factors contributing to belongingness were those who had been at their school for over 30 years; they attributed their sense of belongingness to recognition more often than social connections. Additionally, all teachers who were planning to remain at their school for a year or more also listed support and social connections as the two factors contributing to belongingness. Similarly, those who were unsure about staying included these same factors as well as leadership and recognition in their responses to the question about belonging. Thus, social connections and support emerged as the two most frequently cited codes when looking at length of employment at a school and continued teacher retention.

The same code frequency held true among both men and women. However, when examining these factors in relation to race, we observed deviations from this pattern based on racial identities. The table below highlights in bright yellow the most frequently noted factor by

racial identity where the sample size was greater than or equal to 25 respondents. The lighter yellow indicates the most frequently cited factors where the sample size was less than 10 respondents.

Table 10. Breakdown of factors that contribute to belongingness by racial identity.

	Authenticity	Autonomy	Leadership	Norms/ Values	Recognition	Seen/ Heard	Support	Social Connections
Asian	8%	7%	18%	8%	20%	9%	11%	19%
Black or African American	8%	7%	13%	5%	16%	20%	16%	15%
Middle Eastern*	13%		25%		13%	25%	13%	13%
Native American*	20%	20%		40%			20%	
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander*		33%	33%				33%	
Race Not Listed	7%	11%	11%	7%	11%	6%	20%	26%
Race Unsure/Not Reported	6%		6%	12%	24%	12%	24%	18%
Two or More Races	9%	9%	13%	10%	14%	8%	19%	17%
White	6%	10%	14%	8%	15%	10%	18%	19%

* Indicates fewer than 10 responses.

Black/African Americans chose feeling seen and heard as the top factor that contributed to a sense of belongingness as did Middle Eastern Americans. Likewise, Asian Americans named recognition just slightly more often than social connections and support when thinking about factors that contribute to school belongingness. Only white respondents and those who did not list their race emphasize social connections as the top factor that contributed to belongingness. And, while the sample size was small for Native Americans and Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islanders (n=8), it is worth mentioning that no respondents chose social connections as a factor related to belongingness. These findings are significant because they indicate that while social connections emerged as the top characteristic related to feelings of belongingness, it was chosen largely by white people who outnumbered people of color by a ratio of more than 2:1.

Open-Ended Question 2.

In the second open-ended question, we asked teachers “When you consider signing a contract for another year, how does your sense of belonging at your school impact that decision making process?” For this question, all the codes were drawn from the answers provided by the respondents. The inductive codes encompassed four levels of impact – large, moderate, small, and none, as well as seven descriptive impact factors. These included compensation and benefits, workload and stress, leadership/administration, mission/values, professional growth, parents, and a passion for the work. We then examined the coded responses in much the same way as we did for question one. We looked at how race, gender, employment length, and continued school employment affected these responses.

The respondents overwhelmingly answered that a sense of belongingness played a large role in their decision to re-sign with their school. This was regardless of gender, race, length of employment at the school and willingness to remain at the school. The table below demonstrates that in every instance of tenure, over 50% of the respondents indicated that belongingness contributed in large part to their willingness to return to their current school or seek other opportunities. Thus, creating a sense of belongingness at schools plays a large role in whether or not an employee chooses to return.

Table 11. Impact of belongingness on willingness to re-sign based on employment length.

	Large Impact	Moderate Impact	Small Impact	No Impact
Less than a year	55%	36%	9%	0%
1-5 years	61%	21%	9%	9%
6-10 years	52%	30%	14%	4%
11-15 years	66%	20%	9%	5%
16-20 years	51%	27%	15%	7%
21-25 years	58%	26%	5%	11%
26-30 years	61%	11%	17%	11%
Over 30 years	59%	19%	4%	19%

*Yellow indicates the most frequently cited response by segment of employment length.

In much the same way, nearly all respondents indicated that compensation and benefits played a large role in their decision to sign a contract. It stood out as the top factor among all others except for a few notable cases. For those individuals who had been at their school for over 30 years, they indicated that their passion for teaching was equally important as their compensation (Appendix O). Given the small sample size of this population (n=4), we are unable to generalize whether or not this would hold true for the larger population, but it may be

reasonable to assume that someone who loves what they do would spend over 30 years doing it and for that reason cite it as a top factor for re-signing a contract. Equally telling were the responses given by those who chose not to return to their schools. In all cases, and again this was a small sample size (n=5), the respondents indicated that their decision was predicated upon workload/stress and leadership/administration (Appendix P). Not one respondent chose compensation and benefits. Thus, while compensation and benefits are important factors when it comes to teacher retention, it is likely not the reason that teachers leave their schools.

Open-Ended Question 3.

For the final open-ended question in the survey, we asked a broad, “catch-all” question, “Is there anything else you think we should know about your work environment?” The responses to this question largely cited leadership and administration as the biggest factors contributing to a positive or negative work environment. The inductive codes that emerged from these responses are listed in order of most frequently cited to least frequently cited.

Table 12. Inductive descriptive codes.

Descriptive Codes	
1. Leadership/Administration	5. Autonomy/Decision-Making
2. Workload/Stress	6. Parents/Families
3. Compensation & Benefits Social Connections	7. Mission/Values
4. Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion	8. Professional Growth

They differed only slightly from the previous codes in that respondents cited diversity, equity, and inclusion as well as autonomy/decision-making as additional factors affecting their work environment rather than a passion for the work. All respondents who had worked at their schools for a year or more, and who planned to stay beyond the current year, shared that leadership and administration played the most prominent role in their work environment. For those who had worked at their schools for less than a year, they noted that compensation and benefits outweighed leadership and administration when it came down to shaping their work experience. However, when viewing the responses across racial identities, the populations with fewer respondents (Middle Eastern, Native American, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Race Not Reported) cited compensation and benefits as well as DEI more often than leadership in their comments (Appendix Q). In fact, nonwhite respondents cited DEI as the second most thought-about factor when describing their work environment. This is noteworthy because different factors may affect the work environment to different degrees based on one’s racial identity.

Research Findings

We identified three major findings through our analysis of the data. We then utilized these findings to inform a series of recommendations for independent school leaders. We learned from our analysis that, overall, independent schools have not created a high salience of belonging in their institutional climates. Independent school faculty ranked their sense of belonging only slightly above neutral, with an average belonging scale score of 3.62. This baseline provides a significant opportunity for improvement. We identified from previous research that belongingness matters in terms of retention (Davis, et.al, 2019; Paton, 2010; Carr, et.al, 2019). Furthermore, our analysis demonstrated that incremental improvements in belonging yield positive results for retention. Armed with these insights, we believe that independent school leaders have an opportunity to advance the baseline belongingness experienced by faculty and improve retention. Our forthcoming findings and accompanying recommendations directly address our research questions and build upon these underlying insights.

Belongingness

Research Question 1: How do feelings of belongingness influence teacher retention at independent schools?

Finding 1: The top three factors contributing to feelings of belongingness were social connections, support, and recognition.

“It makes a huge impact to have a sense of belonging. The students and parents will change each year, but your colleagues and administration are constant, so having a sense of community among faculty and staff makes a huge difference to the overall working environment.”

“I feel regularly supported by my co-workers and immediate supervisor. We have time to eat lunch together and enjoy each other’s company.”

“Recognition from admin when I’ve done a task well, allowing me to take on new tasks and use my judgment in decision making, enjoying time with faculty outside of work events and supporting students in athletics when I go to things on my off time.”

The top three factors contributing to feelings of belongingness across the full sample of open-ended survey responses were social connections, support, and recognition. Within social connections there were several sub-categories, teachers described social connections between themselves and colleagues, students, administrators, and parents. Of these four sub-groups, social connections with their colleagues was most frequently cited as an important influence on feelings of belonging at their school. In addition, our quantitative analysis revealed a positive

correlation between relationships and feelings of belonging, with the highest average Likert response to this question, “My relationships within my school community, and the quality and longevity of those relationships, motivate me to remain at my school/renew my contract.” The second most frequently cited contributor to our qualitative findings, was a feeling of support from both colleagues and administrators. Finally, faculty spoke about the importance of feeling “seen and heard” and thus recognized for their contributions to the community. Almost 60% of respondents mentioned these three factors in response to this question.

The overall mean of workplace belongingness amongst respondents in our study was 3.62, falling between “neither agree nor disagree” and “somewhat agree.” Thus, while teachers described the importance of feeling like they belonged at a school, there is a lot of room for improvement in moving the average belongingness scores higher across independent schools. One could also say that it doesn’t take high belongingness to influence feelings of belongingness.

Finding 2: Feelings of belongingness strongly influenced faculty decisions to remain at a school.

“My sense of belonging greatly impacts my decision-making progress - since I have strong bonds with several colleagues, I am more inclined to remain at this school.”

“[Belongingness] is a huge factor as it helps me to get over any hurdles or challenges that might dissuade me.”

“[Belongingness] makes a considerable impact. I feel a part of a group or community, which makes me want to stay, but I also know that I need to do what is best for my own wellbeing, which might be leaving.”

“[Belongingness] is huge. If I did not feel like I was part of a community, I would have no reason to stay.”

Across our qualitative and quantitative results, we found that feelings of belongingness influenced one’s decision to remain at a school. Over 50% of respondents indicated that belongingness contributed in large part to their willingness to return to their current school or seek other opportunities. The conditional mean of belonging for faculty members intending to stay at their institutions for five or more years increased overall feelings of belonging by 0.88, nearly one point on the belongingness scale from 1-5, indicating that small increases in feelings of belongingness can make a large difference. While the correlation suggests only a weak, positive correlation, given that faculty members planning to stay at their institutions had higher belonging scale scores, we believe this preliminary finding warrants further attention.

Throughout the survey, respondents provided a variety of different answers when it came to determining what kept them at their current school. This was largely dependent on the phrasing of the questions. For example, when asked about which factor most influenced their

willingness to stay at their school, respondents selected the ability to impact students more often than support and relationships combined. Yet, when provided with open-ended questions related to belongingness and a willingness to re-sign a contract with their current school, they focused more on compensation/benefits, workload/stress, and leadership/administration. Based on these myriad responses, it appears that while the ability to impact students plays a significant role in choosing to stay at one's school, it does not contribute to a sense of belongingness among teachers. Determining which factor is more influential in a teacher's decision to stay at a school would be worth exploring further. This could help leaders better determine how to develop a culture of meaningful relationships that aids in retaining teachers.

We suggest that future studies reconsider the wording of the questions around tenure and retention plans. For example, we would change the question to "Are you planning to stay at your school for more than X years?" and include a yes/no binary to re-run the quantitative findings. We believe this data might be more telling. In addition, for respondents who were planning to leave their school, we did not include a question that gleaned whether this was due to retirement, relocation, or job dissatisfaction. Understanding more about the 'why' influencing a faculty member's response could also be compared to belongingness scale scores to better understand motivations.

Ingersoll's extensive research (Ingersoll, 2001; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003) recognized the importance of organizational characteristics in teacher retention in public schools. Given our initial findings, we believe NAIS has an opportunity to further consider how this research plays out within its member institutions. More significant studies may ensure that independent school leaders can best understand how school climate characteristics, including belonging, influence faculty retention.

Workplace Climate Drivers

Research Question 2: What characteristics of an independent school climate foster feelings of belonging within independent school faculty?

Finding 3: Relationships with colleagues and others within the school community increase feelings of belongingness for independent school faculty.

Within the workplace-related needs assessment, respondents with higher scores on their relationships with colleagues and others within their school community had higher scores of belongingness. This finding showcases the necessity for supportive relationships within the workplace. In harkening back to Maslow (1943), belongingness develops as a result of building meaningful relationships. Such relationships are marked by lasting, positive interactions with a number of different individuals (Baumeister and Leary, 2017). Without them, individuals, and in this case teachers, may look elsewhere for them. As one respondent noted in our survey,

“My sense of belonging is determined by my relationships here, and those relationships are a HUGE part of why I stay despite ongoing frustrations.”

But relationships are nuanced and require a keen awareness of what contributes to positive ones for different subsets of individuals.

Finding 4: School leaders have an outsized impact on workplace climate.

As school administrators look to create environments that foster feelings of belongingness, they should consider how their own relationships with teachers affect the workplace climate. This finding is based on the responses to the open-ended question, “Is there anything else you think we should know about your work environment?” Many individuals cited leadership as one of greatest contributors to a positive or negative work environment. This indicates that the relationships that leaders build with their teachers impact the quality of the workplace. In fact, for those who chose not to return to their school the following year, this reason, along with workload/stress, was cited as the top reason for not returning. Across all responses for the last two open-ended questions, leadership was cited as the most significant element affecting the workplace environment. Learning more about which factors affect the quality of the relationship between leaders and teachers would be worth exploring in a follow-up study so that leaders might better understand how to improve such relationships and thus, positively affect teacher retention.

Recommendations

Research Question 3: What can independent schools do to increase belongingness outcomes amongst faculty?

Based on our research, we have three recommendations to offer NAIS and its affiliated independent schools.

1. Prioritize belongingness as a component of school climate.
2. Foster relationships amongst colleagues.
3. Invest in leadership.

Recommendation 1: Prioritize Belongingness as a Component of School Climate

Significant research across industries demonstrates the importance of belonging as a factor in retention (Davis, et.al, 2019; Paton, 2010; Carr, et.al, 2019), yet independent school faculty are only slightly above neutral in their overall feelings of belongingness. As independent school leaders, there is an opportunity to first recognize the importance of belonging in schools and then take steps to prioritize and invest in belonging among faculty.

Diagnose a belongingness baseline.

We recommend using a belongingness instrument to collect concrete data that may be used to inform future planning. For ease of use, independent school leaders may consider the Jena & Pradhan (2018) Belongingness Scale that we used in our survey. By comparing their school's belonging numbers to our baseline mean of 3.62, leaders can get a quick snapshot of how their school compares to the average we calculated from our sample of NAIS member schools. Using a quantitative measure reduces any bias respondents may hold regarding their individual interpretation of belonging. Armed with a baseline assessment of belonging, leaders may explore focus groups or additional qualitative data collection methods to further understand faculty's feelings and the reasons behind those feelings.

Conduct a professional development audit with a lens toward belonging.

The independence of a NAIS school provides the flexibility and latitude for leaders to respond to calls for increased belonging in ways that align with board-approved mission, vision, and values of the institution. School leaders should evaluate whether their current financial investments in professional development, training, and in-service activities contribute to belongingness. Many schools already align professional development spending with their board-approved strategic imperatives. We recommend adding a mechanism to track whether these investments may influence belonging. If not, are there opportunities to extend the investment that may do so? For example, if colleagues are participating in an independent, virtual training session on early intervention literacy strategies, consider scheduling a follow-up lunch – with coverage provided – that allows participants to come together and share their learnings and feedback. Simple investments can shift an exercise with no emphasis on belonging to one in which colleagues have a chance to connect and share experiences.

Assess how demographic factors influence belonging at individual schools – and intervene when necessary.

Independent school leaders may find that most of their faculty report high levels of belonging within their institution. However, it is necessary to assess whether underrepresented minorities or other demographic populations are having a different experience. The limitations of

our study prohibited deeper exploration of demographic characteristics and their influence on belonging, but research like that from Walton and Brady (2017) suggests it matters. They found outgroup individuals experience the effects of belonging-related stressors with greater intensity than those who belong to ingroups (Walton and Brady, 2017). Leaders should consider interventions that address the experiences of those subgroups within their faculty. Pour-Khorshid (2018) found that “affinity spaces for educators of color are necessary in order to support their personal, political, relational, and pedagogical growth, which has implications on their retention and leadership within the field” (p. 318). The qualitative research of Mawhinney, et al. (2021) discovered that “teacher activist networks continue to prevent the isolation experienced by teachers of color in the workplace, especially those networks that create space for racial affinity groups” (p. 13).

In the following sections, we further detail recommendations for influencing institutional belonging. School leaders may examine how these are experienced differently across their diverse faculty. Being intentional in the design and execution of these strategies to ensure it meets the needs of diverse populations is a foundational step all school leaders can take.

Recommendation 2: Foster Relationships Amongst Colleagues in Independent Schools

Belongingness is defined by Baumeister and Leary (2017) as the human desire for “lasting, positive and significant interpersonal relationships” (p. 500) and requires frequent interactions with another person and a relationship “marked by stability, affective concern and continuation into the foreseeable future” (p. 500). Our study found that teachers who have significant and positive relationships with their colleagues feel they belong at a school and are more likely to stay. Thus, we recommend that schools take action to increase the opportunities for faculty to form bonds with each other that are stable and will continue into the foreseeable future. There are several steps that schools can take to create a climate that fosters these relationships.

“I feel cared for deeply by my colleagues and friends at school. I feel that I have autonomy in my teaching and support in trying new things and solving problems. We often share food and spend time together even after students go home. I feel safe and seen at my school.”

Designate physical spaces for collaboration, such as shared offices and spaces for informal faculty interaction.

Taylor (2008) in her study of fostering a supportive environment at work found that small changes in the physical environment can have a significant effect on social connections, "when the organization is seen as having workers' interests at heart, perceived social support is higher" (p. 280).

Respondents to the open-ended question, "What characteristics of an independent school climate foster feelings of belonging within independent school faculty?" described several interventions that have helped them to feel connected to colleagues. These include spaces that are designed for collaboration, such as shared offices and spaces for informal faculty interactions.

"Having a 7th grade level office (instead of departments) has helped me feel extremely connected to my coworkers. We are friends who hang out outside work."

Schedule time for connection and conversation.

Social events and activities that allow teachers to connect on a personal level outside of the classroom, including team-building exercises, potluck lunches, or after-school gatherings can help to create a relaxed and enjoyable environment that encourages conversation and helps build

"When we have casual community gatherings to 'break bread' together, we have time to build relationships with each other."

relationships. Eating together was also cited by several respondents as a time for faculty to get to know each other on a deeper level. Arranging the school schedule to allow common time for teams to eat together, along with places where they can do so, can have a big impact on social relationships.

Facilitate teambuilding and informal collaboration among faculty.

Relationships are built when there are opportunities for people to get to know each other outside of the classroom. Schools can encourage regular and open communication by creating opportunities for sharing successes and concerns. This can include formal team building activities along with less formal social gatherings. A culture of collaboration, support, and respect among teachers is created in an environment where teachers feel comfortable seeking advice and sharing ideas. Encouraging positive feedback and recognition among staff members and promoting a sense of appreciation and camaraderie reinforces a positive environment and encourages teachers to support one another, thus further building collegial faculty relationships.

"Collaborating in small groups helps me feel more connected with my colleagues. A lot of our day is spent working alone/in siloes."

Recommendation 3: Invest in Leadership Development

“Our school leader is personable and takes the time to note effort. We have a very collegial, supportive and non-hierarchical staff and faculty structure, so everyone's voice, professionalism and input is valued.”

“Administration makes me feel empowered to have confidence in my abilities. The faculty feels like a community in itself.”

“When administration is honest and transparent, I feel much more included in decisions, and I can understand the motivation for decisions.”

To create a positive work environment, leaders need training in a variety of areas including communication, giving and receiving feedback, and creating cultures of trust and appreciation. These themes emerged from the excerpts of our three open-ended questions that were coded for “leadership.” Given that many administrators in independent schools rise through the ranks of a school from teacher to administrator, it is not surprising they would lack leadership training when it comes to working with adults. Simply moving out of the classroom does not inherently provide an administrator with leadership skills even if they possess the personality characteristics to take on the responsibilities.

Provide access to communication workshops and professional development.

Several respondents cited poor communication between teachers and administrators as the reason for a negative work environment. As one individual noted, “Communication is crucial, and they are lousy at it.” For those seeking improved communication, they asked for greater transparency about decision-making processes. At the same time, those who experienced good leadership alluded to transparent communication as a factor contributing to a supportive workplace. Thus, leaders need access to workshops that help them effectively communicate with their teachers both in writing and in person. This might include how to write agendas, communicate and uphold expectations, as well as set boundaries. NAIS is poised to offer such workshops through their annual conference, online platforms, and *Independent Magazine* articles and blog posts. Providing these resources to leaders will allow independent schools to bolster their workplace morale and, in turn, retain teachers. And, given that teacher retention is directly tied to student achievement (Ronfelt, Loeb, and Wyckoff, 2013), this type of leadership training stands to benefit the children in these schools as well.

Support school leaders in their aptitude to give and receive feedback.

While teachers know that students need to receive feedback to improve their learning, so too do teachers to improve their craft. For that matter, leaders also need feedback, and this can come from teachers in independent schools. Yet, giving and receiving feedback is an artform that requires practice. If it is too negative, it will not be received well. If it is not authentic or meaningful, it will be ineffectual. To that end, leaders need training on how to provide effective feedback to teachers while also being mindful of how these same teachers like to receive feedback. As mentioned earlier, NAIS is in a position to provide leaders with this type of education. Offering professional development on this topic will not only improve a leader's ability to give and receive feedback, but it will also enhance the workplace culture by creating a system of internal communication where the employees feel seen and heard. And knowing that feeling seen and heard contributes to a sense of belongingness among the respondents, this is yet another way to increase those feelings.

"We do not receive feedback or if we do it is often negative."

Provide coaching and mentoring to leaders.

Sentiments like these capture a culture of appreciation and trust. While these feelings may be intangible, they can be developed through intentional actions and behaviors on the part of a leader. This means administrators must design routines that prioritize relationships and recognize the efforts and accomplishments of their teachers. Certainly, administrators can learn how to do this by reading books and articles on leadership strategies, but perhaps the most useful path to leadership success comes from following in the footsteps of other noteworthy leaders. To do this, administrators need mentors and coaches. NAIS has the resources to draw from in order to help make matches between new leaders and veteran leaders. In much the same way that Brill and McCartney (2008) describe the value of mentoring programs as mutually beneficial to both new and veteran teachers so too can this same logic be applied to administrators. Providing a forum in which mentorship can take place will help emerging and struggling leaders create communities that foster greater belongingness among their teachers.

"Our school leader is personable and takes the time to note effort."

"People make an effort to know you - both staff and admin. They celebrate all the parts of academic and personal life and pump each other up."

Discussion and Conclusion

In partnership with the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS), we explored belongingness amongst independent school faculty and its influence on retention. Through a survey of independent school faculty across the United States, we collected and analyzed responses to address our research questions, aiming to discover how belongingness influences teacher retention and what characteristics of school climate foster feelings of belonging. While

we found that overall feelings of belongingness across faculty in independent schools was lower than anticipated, we also found that incremental improvements in belonging influence faculty retention in positive ways. The recommendations we provided are actionable steps to begin improving the belonging baseline. Independent school leaders have a significant opportunity to prioritize fostering climates of belonging and yield higher rates of retention amongst their teachers.

Areas for Further Inquiry

Given the findings of this study, and the limitations we faced, we recommend two areas of further inquiry:

- The influence of demographic characteristics (race, gender, sexual orientation) on belonging amongst independent school faculty.
- The attributes of leaders that promote climates of belonging within independent schools.

The scope of this study focused more broadly on belonging and only minimally considered the influence of demographic criteria on various findings. While initial analysis demonstrated little variability in belonging based on demographic differences, further inquiry is required to consider how race and belonging may guide further exploration of belongingness amongst independent school faculty. Among independent schools, the recruitment and retention of educators of color has become a priority in recent years. Yet, when we look across groups of people, outgroups such as historically marginalized minorities have struggled the most to feel a sense of belonging within mainstream culture and especially at independent schools. They often lack a connection to place and culture in the way that individuals who identify with in-groups do not. Walton and Brady (2017) suggest that outgroup individuals experience the effects of belonging-related stressors with greater intensity than those who belong to ingroups. In a recent study on the retention and belongingness of educators of color in mostly white schools in Iowa, Grooms et al. (2021) concluded that teachers had a positive sense of belonging in their schools when they were able to openly influence areas related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Further research suggests that educators of color not only help improve achievement for students of color (Bristol & Martin-Fernandez, 2019; Easton-Brooks, 2014), they also function as role models for students of all racial backgrounds (Boser, 2011; Learning Policy Institute, 2018; Villegas et al., 2012, Wilder, 2000). Thus, teachers of color's feelings of belongingness can potentially affect the entire school community in positive ways. We propose additional studies to consider these assumptions.

An expanded study may also consider leadership characteristics that are most closely associated with teachers' feeling of belonging. Generalized findings demonstrated the importance of leadership, but the scope of our project did not provide the opportunity to dive into specific leadership attributes shared by those individuals who foster feelings of belonging within their schools. In their review of research, Korkmaz et al. (2022) examined 170 studies of inclusive

leadership and identified four dimensions of inclusive leadership, “fostering employee’s uniqueness (e.g., promoting diversity); strengthening belongingness within a team (e.g., building relationships); showing appreciation (e.g., recognizing efforts and contributions); and supporting organizational efforts (e.g., promoting organizational mission on inclusion)” (p. 1). By acknowledging and employing these four elements in their work, leaders can strengthen belongingness within a team and build relationships with employees that allow them to share in the decision-making of the organization and ensure equity among workers. Randel et al. (2018) found three behaviors that facilitate belongingness in the workplace, “1) supporting group members, 2) ensuring that justice and equity are part of each member’s experience, and 3) providing opportunities for shared decision-making on relevant issues” (p. 193). An additional inquiry may consider the development of survey questions to determine types of leadership and their relationship to teachers’ feelings of belonging.

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Appendices

Appendix A

- NAIS -

VISION + MISSION + VALUES

VISION

All learners find pathways to success through the independence, innovation, and diversity of our schools, creating a more equitable world.

MISSION

As the largest association of independent schools, NAIS co-creates the future of education by uniting and empowering our community.

We do this through thought leadership, research, creation and curation of resources, and direct collaboration with education leaders.

VALUES

THINKING INDEPENDENTLY

We believe in independence and its power to inspire excellence.

LEADING CHANGE

We imagine possibilities and innovate to strengthen the education landscape.

EMBRACING DIVERSITY

We welcome and encourage diverse identities and perspectives.

CHAMPIONING INCLUSIVITY

We affirm the rights of every individual to belong and flourish.

EMPOWERING COMMUNITY

We address complex issues through collaboration and advocacy.

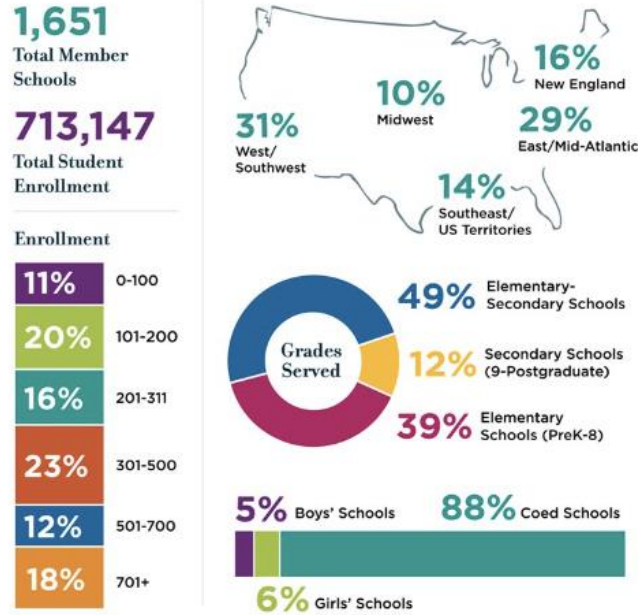
Appendix B

Belongingness Scale

1. I am able to work in this school without sacrificing my principles.
2. I use “we/us” rather than “they/them” when I refer to my school to outsiders.
3. I feel that there is a connection between my own values and beliefs and those of the school.
4. I generally carry more positive emotions than negative ones while I am at school.
5. Being part of my school inspires me to do more than what is expected.
6. At work, I have a lot in common with my coworkers.
7. Fairness is maintained while executing rules and policies in my school.
8. My personal needs are well-met by my school.
9. Whenever I have any personal or professional issues, my school extends necessary help and support.
10. My career goals are well considered by my school.
11. My school tries to make my job as exciting and promising as possible.
12. Accomplishments at work are adequately rewarded in my school.

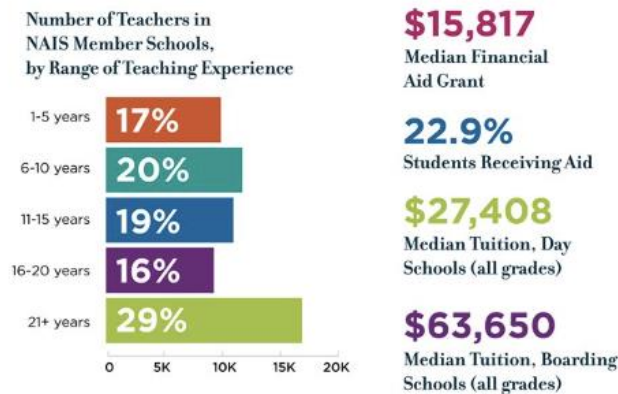
Appendix C

NAIS Member Demographics



Data represents membership as of September 2022.

Inside Our Schools



Based on schools that responded to annual Data and Analysis for School Leadership (DASL) survey for the 2021-2022 academic year.

Appendix D Survey Sample Population

Updated from Vanderbilt Capstone Group

torres@nais.org <torres@nais.org>

Sun, Mar 19, 2023 at 12:00 PM

To: Meghan Bollens <meghanbollens@stedmunds.net>

Cc: Jill Bergeron <jbergeron@bwscampus.com>, Liz Davis <liz.davis@altavistaschoolsf.org>

Hi Meghan,

We sent the survey to a sample of 5,335 teachers included in our data based. While I can't share with you the names of the teachers or the schools in the list, the breakdowns are as follows:

Type	% Sample	% NAIS
Boarding	2%	2%
Boarding Day	14%	14%
Day	84%	84%
Gender	% Sample	% NAIS
Boys	4%	5%
CoEd	88%	89%
Girls	8%	6%
Size	% Sample	% NAIS
Under 201	24%	34%
201-300	12%	15%
301-500	25%	22%
501-700	15%	11%
701+	24%	18%

Grades	% Sample	% NAIS
Elementary	38%	41%
Elementary-Secondary	48%	46%
Secondary	14%	13%

Region	% Sample	% NAIS
East (NJ, NY)	12%	13%
Mid-Atlantic (DE, DC, MD, PA, VA)	19%	16%
Midwest (IL, IN, IA, KY, MI, MN, MO, NE, ND, OH, SD, WV, WI)	11%	10%
New England (CT, ME, MA, NH, RI, VT)	15%	16%
Southeast (AL, FL, GA, MS, NC, SC, TN)	11%	13%
Southwest (AZ, AR, CO, KS, LA, NM, OK, TX)	8%	10%
US Territories (GU, PR, VI)	1%	1%
West (AK, CA, HI, ID, MT, NV, OR, UT, WA, WY)	23%	22%

Appendix E

NAIS Dashboard of Survey Responses

Belongingness Amongst Independent School Faculty

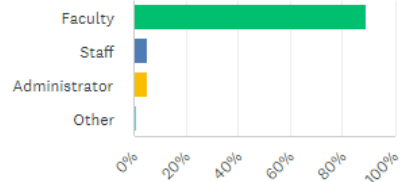
Create your own surveys for free

SIGN UP FREE

Belongingness Amongst Independent School Faculty

My primary role at school is:

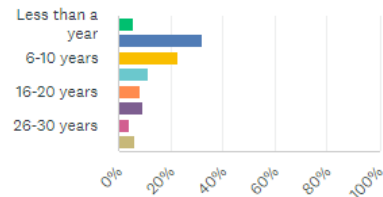
Answered: 857 Skipped: 0



Belongingness Amongst Independent School... (0)

I have been an employee at this...

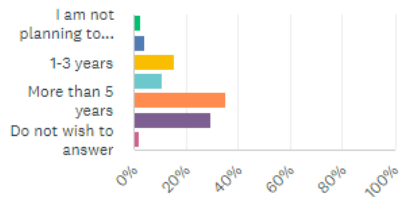
Answered: 821 Skipped: 36



Belongingness Amongst Independent School... (0)

I plan to stay at my school for:

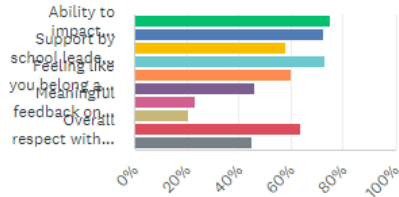
Answered: 822 Skipped: 35



Belongingness Amongst Independent School... (0)

If you are planning to remain at...

Answered: 787 Skipped: 70



Belongingness Amongst Independent School... (0)

Of the above categories selecte...

My gender is:

Alt+Q

Dashboard Share Link

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/stories/SM-q7149VJJ87>

COPY

Powered by SurveyMonkey

Appendix F Descriptive Statistics

	Belonging	SelfRealization	Workload	Conflict
Count	728	709	711	707
Mean	3.62	3.7	3.7	1.99
Median	3.75	3.75	3.75	2
Q1	3.08	3.25	3.33	1
Q3	4.25	4.25	4.08	2.5
Min	1	1.25	1.67	1
Max	5	5	5	5
Missing	95	114	112	116
Standard Deviation	0.84	0.76	0.54	1.01
Sample Variance	0.7	0.58	0.29	1.02
Standard Error	0.03	0.03	0.02	0.04

	Nervousness	Group	PeopleTalk	Friends
Count	710	705	704	706
Mean	2.33	3.97	3.99	3.93
Median	2	4	4	4
Q1	1.5	4	4	3
Q3	3	5	5	5
Min	1	1	1	1
Max	5	5	5	5
Missing	113	118	119	117
Standard Deviation	0.99	1.02	1.04	1.17
Sample Variance	0.98	1.05	1.09	1.37
Standard Error	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.04

	GoodJob	BeMyself	EnjoyTask	Relationship
Count	706	703	706	706
Mean	4.65	4.03	3.84	3.91
Median	5	4	4	4
Q1	4	4	3	3
Q3	5	5	4	5
Min	1	1	1	1
Max	5	5	5	5
Missing	117	120	117	117
Standard Deviation	0.55	1.05	0.98	1.18
Sample Variance	0.3	1.1	0.97	1.39
Standard Error	0.02	0.04	0.04	0.04

Appendix G

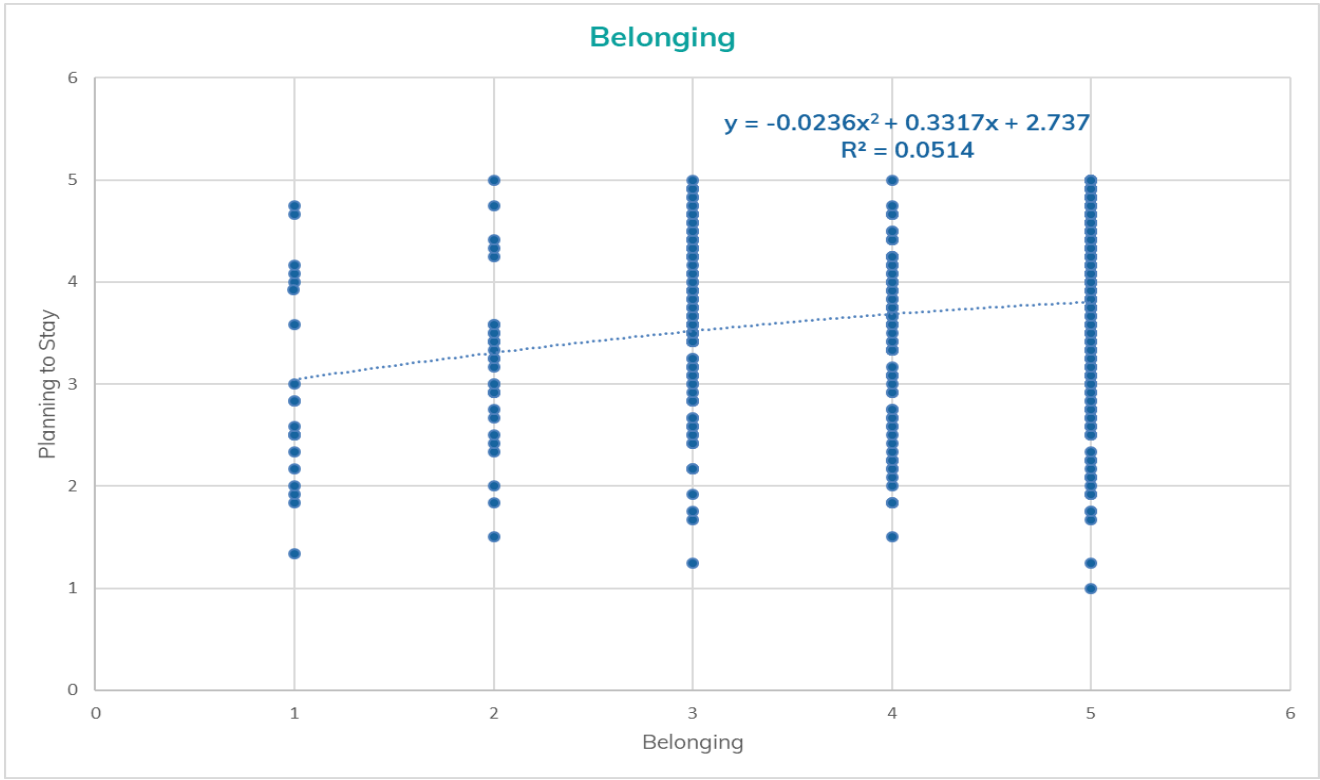
How Long an Employee Planned to Stay at Their Current School

Stay Code	
Not planning to stay	1
Less than a year	2
1-3 Years	3
4-5 Years	4
More than 5	5

Appendix H
Length of Employment at Current School

Length Code	
Less than a year	1
1-5 years	2
6-10 years	3
11-15 years	4
16-20 years	5
21-25 years	6
26-30 years	7
Over 30 years	8

Appendix I Correlation of Belonging and Planning to Stay



Appendix J Multiple Linear Regression Model

SUMMARY OUTPUT								
<i>Regression Statistics</i>								
Multiple R	0.265606424							
R Square	0.070546773							
Adjusted R Square	0.065983172							
Standard Error	0.703831535							
Observations	615							
<i>ANOVA</i>								
	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Significance F</i>			
Regression	3	22.97355809	7.657852696	15.45857886	1.05268E-09			
Residual	611	302.6764645	0.495378829					
Total	614	325.6500226						
	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>t Stat</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Lower 95%</i>	<i>Upper 95%</i>	<i>Lower 95.0%</i>	<i>Upper 95.0%</i>
Intercept	3.041912128	0.127524561	23.85353924	2.20283E-89	2.791472487	3.292351768	2.791472487	3.292351768
PeopleTalk	0.020193756	0.035127292	0.574873698	0.56558833	-0.048791122	0.089178635	-0.048791122	0.089178635
Friends	0.032232675	0.029140498	1.106112712	0.269113057	-0.024995013	0.089460362	-0.024995013	0.089460362
Relationships	0.139727653	0.029858775	4.679617676	3.54204E-06	0.081089373	0.198365933	0.081089373	0.198365933

Appendix K Survey Questions

Survey Questions – Belongingness Amongst Independent School Faculty

Thank you for completing this survey. Findings will be shared with NAIS-member schools to help school leaders cultivate positive school climates that inspire meaningful work for teachers.

- Your participation is voluntary, and you may quit at any time. All responses are anonymous.
- The survey should take about 5 minutes to complete.
- If you choose to provide contact information after submitting your survey, your name will be entered into a drawing for one of four \$50 Target gift cards.

Demographic Information

Please provide some personal demographic information.

My primary role at school is:

- Faculty
- Staff
- Administrator
- Other

I have been an employee at this school:

- Less than a year
- 1-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- 16-20 years
- 21-25 years
- 26-30 years
- Over 30 years

I plan to stay at my school for:

- Less than a year
- 1-3 years
- 4-5 years
- More than 5 years
- Unsure
- Do not wish to answer

If you are planning to remain at your school, which categories influence your decision to stay? Please select all that apply.

- Ability to impact students;
- Relationships with colleagues;
- Support by school leaders;
- Autonomy and power to make curricular decisions in your classroom;
- Feeling like you belong at your school;
- Professional development and growth opportunities;
- Meaningful feedback on progress and performance;
- Engagement in activities not related to teaching that are fair and appropriate;
- Overall respect with which you are treated at your school;
- Overall morale at your school

Of the above categories selected, which is most influential on your decision to stay at your school?

- Ability to impact students;
- Relationships with colleagues;
- Support by school leaders;
- Autonomy and power to make curricular decisions in your classroom;
- Feeling like you belong at your school;
- Professional growth opportunities;

- Meaningful feedback on progress and performance;
- Engagement in activities not related to teaching that are fair and appropriate;
- Overall respect with which you are treated at your school;
- Overall morale at your school

My current gender identity is:

- Female
- Male
- Non-binary
- Other

My race is:

- Asian
- Black or African American
- Middle Eastern
- Native American
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- White
- Two or More Races
- Race Not Listed
- Race Unsure/Not Reported

Belongingness

Please share the level of your agreement/disagreement with the following sentiments:

Likert:

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

1. I am able to work in this school without sacrificing my principles.
2. I use "we/us" rather than "they/them" when I refer to my school to outsiders.
3. I feel that there is a connection between my own values and beliefs and those of my school.
4. I generally carry more positive emotions than negative ones while I am at school.
5. Being a part of my school inspires me to do more than what is expected.
6. At work I have a lot in common with my co-workers.
7. Fairness is maintained while executing rules and policies in my school.
8. My personal needs are well met by my school.
9. Whenever I have any personal or professional issues my school extends necessary help and support.
10. My career goals are well-considered by my school.
11. My school tries to make my job as exciting and promising as possible.
12. Accomplishments at work are adequately rewarded in my school.

School Environment

Please mark the answer you think describes what you feel.

Likert scale (for questions 1-6)

- Not at all
- To a small extent
- To some extent
- To a large extent
- To a very large extent

1. To what extent does what you do at school give you a chance to see how good your abilities really are?
2. To what extent does what you do at school help you to have more confidence in yourself?
3. To what extent do you feel nervous or tense at school?
4. To what extent do you find that you can use yourself, your knowledge and experience in the work at your school?
5. To what extent do you find that your teaching is complicated by conflicts among the staff members?
6. To what extent do you find that it can be difficult to reconcile loyalty towards your team with loyalty towards your own profession?

Likert Scale (for questions 7-9)

Very often
Often
Occasionally
Rarely
Never

7. How often does it happen that you are worried about going to work?
8. How frequently do you feel that you get the support you need, when you are faced with difficult problems?
9. How often does it happen that you have a feeling that you should be in several places at the same time?

Likert Scale (for question 10)

Far too few
Too few
Sufficient
Too many
Far too many

10. What do you think about the number of tasks imposed on you?

Workplace Engagement

Please share the level of your agreement/disagreement the following sentiments:

Likert:

Strongly disagree
Somewhat disagree
Neither agree nor disagree
Somewhat agree
Strongly agree

1. At work, I feel part of a group
2. At work, I can talk with people about things that really matter to me
3. Some people I work with are close friends of mine
4. I am good at the things I do in my job
5. I feel like I can be myself at work
6. The tasks I have to do at work are in line with what I really want to do
7. My relationships within my school community, and the quality and longevity of those relationships, motivate me to remain at my school/renew my contract.

Optional Open-ended questions:

1. In what ways does your school make you feel like you belong (or not belong)?

2. When you consider signing a contract for another year, how does your sense of belonging at your school impact that decision making process?
3. Is there anything else you think we should know about your work environment?
4. If you are willing to be contacted for a follow-up interview or focus group, please share your name and email address:

If you would like to be entered into a drawing for one of four \$50 gift cards, please submit your email address via this unique link. Your entrance will not be associated with your survey responses and your survey remains anonymous. [Link to enter into drawing](#).

For any questions about this survey, please contact meghan.bollens@vanderbilt.edu, jill.bergeron@vanderbilt.edu, or elizabeth.b.davis@vanderbilt.edu.

Appendix N Codebook

All codes below were used if the participant cited either its presence or absence.

Question 1 Codes:

In what ways does your school make you feel like you belong (or not belong)?

1. Autonomy/Decision Making: Participants who mention feeling in control of their actions, having the ability to make decisions and choices, and having input on school decisions. (SDT)
2. Social connections: Participants who describe their relationships with others and how these relationships provide them with a sense of belongingness. (BT) (SDT)
 - a. Colleagues
 - b. Students
 - c. Administrators
 - d. Parents
3. Recognition: Participants who describe how being respected and receiving recognition, appreciation, and feedback for their work from colleagues and administrators contributes to a sense of belongingness. (BT)
4. Norms/Values: Participants who describe being aligned with the accepted behaviors, attitudes, and values within their school. (SCT)
5. Authenticity: Participants who describe being able to be their true self at work (inductive)
6. Support: Participants who describe feeling supported and/or valued (personally and/or financially) by the school to try new things and make mistakes; supported to learn and grow through professional development. (inductive)
7. Seen/Heard: Participants who describe being known personally by colleagues and administrators and being seen and heard for who they are (inductive)
8. Leadership: Participants describe leaders and administrators who make them feel they belong through their actions and policies. (inductive)

Question 2 Codes

When you consider signing a contract for another year, how does your sense of belonging at your school impact that decision making process?

1. It has no impact: Participants who indicate that belongingness had no impact on their decision to stay at their school.
2. It has a small impact: Participants who indicate that belongingness had a small, minor, or very little impact on their decision to stay at their school.
3. It has a moderate impact: Participants who indicate that belongingness had a moderate, or some impact on their decision to stay at their school.
4. It has a large impact: Participants who indicate that belongingness had a large, huge, or major impact on their decision to stay at their school.
5. Other factors that influence signing a contract

- a. Compensation and benefits: Participants who indicate that compensation, pay, and benefits (including tuition remission for children) are the reason they sign or don't sign. This includes their ability to find another job at a similar pay level.
- b. Workload and stress levels: Participants who indicate that their workload, number of duties, and additional expectation and stress levels are the reason they sign or don't sign.
- c. Leadership/Administration: Participants who indicate that leadership and administrators are the reason they sign or don't sign.
- d. Mission/Values: Participants who indicate that their alignment with the mission and values of the school are the reason they sign or don't sign.
- e. Love what I do: Participants who indicate that love for their job and their students are the reason they sign or don't sign.
- f. Professional Growth: Participants who indicate that they stay because of opportunities for growth and learning.
- g. Parents: Participants who indicate that relationships with parents are the reason they sign or don't sign.

Questions 3 Codes

Is there anything else you think we should know about your work environment?

1. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI): Participants who indicate that their work environment is or isn't diverse, equitable or inclusive of all people
2. Compensation and benefits: Participants who indicate that compensation, pay, and benefits (including tuition remission for children) have an impact on their work environment.
3. Workload and stress levels: Participants who indicate that their workload, number of duties, and additional expectations and stress levels have an impact on their work environment. This includes the pace of change and the expectation that it places on teachers.
4. Leadership/Administration: Participants who indicate that they are impacted by the leaders in their work environment, including the Head of School and other administrators.
5. Mission/Values: Participants who indicate that the mission and values of the school have an impact on their work environment.
6. Parents/Families: Participants who indicate that interactions with parents and families have an impact on their work environment.
7. Autonomy/Decision Making: Participants who mention feeling in control of their actions, having the ability to make decisions and choices, and having input on school decisions. (SDT)

Appendix O

Answers by Length of Employment to “When you consider signing a contract for another year, how does your sense of belonging at your school impact that decision making process?”

	Workload & Stress Level	Mission/ Values	Leadership/ Administration	Love What I do	Compensation & Benefits	Professional Growth	Parents
Less than a year	22%	22%	0%	0%	33%	22%	0%
1-5 years	4%	15%	19%	9%	40%	11%	2%
6-10 years	10%	10%	12%	24%	38%	5%	2%
11-15 years	14%	21%	21%	7%	36%	0%	0%
16-20 years	16%	0%	16%	16%	53%	0%	0%
21-25 years	19%	13%	19%	0%	44%	6%	0%
26-30 years	0%	17%	8%	17%	50%	8%	0%
Over 30 years	0%	0%	0%	50%	50%	0%	0%

Appendix P

Answers by Potential Retention to “When you consider signing a contract for another year, how does your sense of belonging at your school impact that decision making process?”

	Workload & Stress Level	Mission/ Values	Leadership/ Administration	Love What I do	Compensation & Benefits	Professional Growth	Parents
Unsure	10%	10%	16%	14%	41%	8%	0%
Do not wish to answer	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
I am not planning to remain at my school	60%	0%	40%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Less than a year	29%	0%	29%	0%	43%	0%	0%
1-3 years	13%	13%	13%	8%	38%	13%	4%
4-5 years	6%	12%	18%	0%	59%	6%	0%
More than 5 years	3%	15%	10%	22%	43%	5%	2%

Appendix Q

Answers by Racial Identity to “Is there anything else you think we should know about your work environment?”

	Mission / Values	Compensation & Benefits	DEI	Autonomy/ Decision Making	Leadership & Admin	Workload & Stress Level	Social Connect.	Prof. Growth	Parents / Families
Asian	0%	4%	26%	13%	30%	13%	9%	4%	0%
Black or African American	5%	16%	21%	11%	21%	11%	16%	0%	0%
Middle Eastern*	0%	0%	50%	0%	0%	0%	50%	0%	0%
Native American*	0%	0%	50%	0%	0%	50%	0%	0%	0%
Race Not Listed	0%	5%	21%	0%	32%	26%	16%	0%	0%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander*	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Race Unsure/Not Reported*	20%	40%	0%	0%	20%	20%	0%	0%	0%
2+ Races	0%	6%	25%	6%	44%	6%	6%	0%	6%
White	3%	13%	7%	3%	35%	20%	33	2%	5%

*Sample of five or fewer