

# Belonging

the newsletter from the *FIRST* NC ED&I Team – December 2024

**Equity** – Treating everyone fairly, having equal opportunities and removing barriers.

**Diversity** – The way we are all different.

**Inclusion** – Creating space for everyone where differences are embraced.

## ***A Team Culture of Belonging vs Fitting In – Thoughts for Build Season***

In *FIRST* Robotics teams, the difference between fostering a culture of belonging and one of fitting in is subtle but crucial. As members work together to tackle complex challenges, the way they support and value each other can make all the difference in building a strong, high-performing robot.

A culture of belonging begins with the belief that every member of the team has a unique and important role to play. On a *FIRST* Robotics team, each individual brings different skills, perspectives, and strengths—whether it's in coding, engineering, strategy, or outreach. A culture of belonging ensures that these differences are not just acknowledged, but celebrated. When every team member feels valued for their unique contributions, the team as a whole becomes stronger, more innovative, and more cohesive.

On the other hand, a culture focused on fitting in pressures individuals to conform to the majority. In this environment, members may feel they need to hide what makes them different in order to be accepted. This process, known as assimilation, forces those in the minority to adopt the values, behaviors, or viewpoints of the dominant group, often leading to a loss of personal identity. In a robotics team, this could mean members feeling sidelined if their ideas or ways of thinking don't align with the norm, which stifles creativity and limits the team's potential.

Inclusion is not just a feel-good concept—it has a real impact on team performance. When members of a *FIRST* team feel excluded, their confidence, motivation, and sense of team spirit drop. This can lead to burnout, especially during the intense build season when high levels of collaboration and trust are critical. On the flip side, when a team fosters belonging, it creates a supportive environment where all members are empowered to contribute fully, leading to better retention of talent, more effective teamwork, and higher overall performance.

Think about how it feels to know your teammates trust you and value your contributions, no matter what your role is—whether you're leading the design team or contributing to the outreach strategy. In a culture of belonging, you're more likely to give your best effort, collaborate openly, and bounce back from setbacks with resilience. Now, imagine the opposite: a team where trust is low, and members feel isolated or undervalued. In this scenario, even the most talented individuals struggle to perform at their best, and the team's progress suffers.

As any *FIRST* Robotics team knows, the pressure of build season can be intense. A culture of belonging can be the key to navigating those pressures successfully. When everyone on the team feels seen and heard, innovative solutions emerge, and challenges are met with creativity and unity. It's not about being the same—it's about bringing together a diversity of ideas and skills to create something greater than the sum of its parts.

Building a culture of belonging is one of the most valuable lessons you can take from the program. It's not just about building robots; it's about building people and fostering an environment where everyone feels included and empowered. You don't need to be best friends with every teammate, but learning to celebrate their differences and affirm their identities will serve you long after the robotics season ends.

By creating a team culture that values belonging over fitting in, your team will not only perform better, but you'll also build skills in leadership, collaboration, and empathy that will last a lifetime. This is the true spirit of *FIRST* Robotics—creating a space where all voices matter, and where every team member can thrive.

***How do you and your team make members, coaches and mentors feel they belong? Do you have tips for other teams on how to include people and help them feel they really belong?***

Send them to [FIRSTNC-EDI@googlegroups.com](mailto:FIRSTNC-EDI@googlegroups.com)

## From *FIRST*: Just in case you missed it! – Get Anywhere

***FIRST* is thrilled to announce the launch of “Get Anywhere,” a campaign featuring *FIRST* alumni to grow awareness of how our programs prepares young people for anything they choose to do after high school.**

The breadth of career opportunities that an education in STEM can provide is wider than ever. Today’s students are inspired by *FIRST* to build futures tailored to their unique talents and interests – in diverse fields from engineering to art, pursued through pathways such as higher education and skills-based training.

*FIRST* is thrilled to announce the launch of “Get Anywhere,” a campaign to grow awareness of how *FIRST* prepares young people for anything they choose to do after high school. While students figure out their tomorrows, *FIRST* programs help them build their skills today.

*FIRST* alumni all over the world have harnessed the skills built through *FIRST* programs to have careers within aerospace and agriculture, manufacturing and marketing, game design and oceanography, and more. Across these ever-expanding global industries, leading organizations seek employees equipped with adaptable skills needed for the jobs of tomorrow.

“Get Anywhere” is supported by 3M, Molex, Novelis, and Optimum. These companies recognize the critical role *FIRST* plays in fortifying the STEM pipeline and are seeking talented employees who can help innovate for a better future.

Start with *FIRST* and #GetAnywhere. Learn more [HERE](#)

## December Holidays and Events:

**December 1:** World AIDS Day commemorates those who have died of AIDS and acknowledges the need for continued commitment to all those affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

**December 3:** International Day of Persons with Disabilities was designed to raise awareness regarding persons with disabilities in order to improve their lives and provide them with equal opportunity.

**December 9:** Immaculate Conception of Mary, or the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, celebrates the solemn celebration by various Christian denominations who believe in the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

**December 8:** Bodhi Day, the Buddhist holiday that commemorates the day that Siddhartha Gautama experienced enlightenment.

**December 10:** International Human Rights Day was established by the United Nations in 1948 to commemorate the anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

**December 12:** Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe is a religious holiday in Mexico commemorating the appearance of the Virgin Mary near Mexico City in 1531.

**December 16 to December 24:** Las Posadas is a nine-day celebration in Mexico commemorating the trials Mary and Joseph endured during their journey to Bethlehem.

**December 25 (nightfall) to January 2 (nightfall):** Hanukkah is a Jewish holiday that is celebrated for eight days and nights. Hanukkah celebrates the victory of the Maccabees, or Israelites, over the Greek-Syrian ruler, Antiochus, approximately 2,200 years ago.

**December 21:** Yule Winter Solstice is celebrated by Pagans and Wiccans. The first day of winter (and the shortest day of the year) represents a celebration focusing on rebirth, renewal, and new beginnings as the sun makes its way back to the Earth. A solstice is an astronomical event that happens twice each year when the sun reaches its highest position in the sky.

**December 25:** Christmas Day is the day that many Christians associate with Jesus’ birth.

**December 26:** Boxing Day is a secular holiday celebrated in the United Kingdom, Canada, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, and South Africa.

**December 26 to January 1:** Kwanzaa is a seven-day celebration of African-American culture and life originally founded in 1966.

**December 27:** St. John's Apostle and Evangelist Day is the feast day for St. John celebrated by Christian denominations.

**December 28:** Feast of the Holy Innocents is a Christian feast in remembrance of the massacre of young children in Bethlehem by King Herod the Great in his attempt to kill the infant Jesus.

**December 31:** Watch Night is a day for Christians to review the year that has passed, make confessions, and then prepare for the year ahead by praying and resolving.

If you spot an error in the newsletter, please email us at: [FIRSTNC-EDI@googlegroups.com](mailto:FIRSTNC-EDI@googlegroups.com)

## Inspiration & Recognition Spotlight: #PeopleofSTEAM: Meet Ixchel



Ixchel's journey with *FIRST* began at age five in *FIRST LEGO League*, empowering her to chart an exciting path from homeschool robotics enthusiast to real-world engineering warrior. She recalls a life-changing moment while attending *FIRST Championship* in 2013 and seeing *FIRST Robotics Competition* robots for the first time: "Seeing those big robots in action ignited my passion," said Ixchel. "Coming from a rural community with limited resources, I felt embraced by the *FIRST* community, my coaches and teammates, which motivated me to excel."

Read more **HERE** – [#PeopleofSTEAM: Meet Ixchel](#)

## ED&I and YPP Training: *FIRST* Resources Reminders

### ***FIRST* Youth Protection Program:**

The purpose of the *FIRST* Youth Protection Program is to provide coaches, mentors, event volunteers, employees, Program Delivery Partners, team members, parents, guardians of team members, and others working with *FIRST* programs with information, guidelines, and procedures to create safe environments for *FIRST* participants.

Read more **HERE:** [Youth Protection Program](#)

### **Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Training & Resources:**

As part of *FIRST*'s commitment to creating a diverse, inclusive, and equitable community for all their participants, they have partnered with leading organizations to create complimentary trainings on how you can inspire the youth voice, create a sense of belonging, and more.

Read more **HERE:** [Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Training & Resources](#)

The *FIRST* NC ED&I Team: Contact us at: [FIRSTNC-EDI@googlegroups.com](mailto:FIRSTNC-EDI@googlegroups.com)

We are a team of coaches/mentors who want to help create a community and culture of people who embrace the values of equity, diversity, and inclusion, who want to develop themselves, and who understand that growth and diversity of all types lead to team excellence.

*Anisha Patel (she/her) - The Pitt Pirates 2642*

*Dave Lashley (he/him) - Team SPORK 3196*

All Editions are Available Online at: <https://www.firstnorthcarolina.org/belonging-newsletter>