



# How can you unlock the transformative power of belonging?

Tips for an inclusive virtual classroom

Inclusiveness is leveraging differences to achieve better results and creating an environment where all people feel they belong and are valued. The experience of belonging can still be achieved in a digital setting when intentional inclusion is practiced. When people feel like they belong, they are more motivated and engaged, perform better and see increased physical and mental health and outcomes. This can also support student success in the classroom.

We have compiled several tips to promote inclusion and belonging when holding classes in a digital environment.



All learners are made to **feel safe**.



All students feel that they **belong and then contribute**.



More **diversity** of participation may lead to **more depth and richness** of discussion.



The better the question. The better the answer.  
The better the world works.



Building a better working world

## Before class

- ▶ Provide slides and an outline well in advance of the class
- ▶ Ask for, learn and use student names and pronouns, which may not be displayed in the school's learning software
- ▶ Dress as if you were teaching live, as this can promote your own self-confidence
- ▶ Create an opt-in opportunity for students to share phone and social media handles with their classmates
- ▶ Leave the virtual tool on before and after class with students off mute so that they can continue to connect with each other as a virtual coffee chat; consider joining them
- ▶ Add welcome activities to any given day just as you may have on the first day of class
- ▶ Assess and adjust what activity needs to happen synchronously and what can happen asynchronously, considering inclusion
- ▶ Remind students that even a virtual classroom is a safe space

## Ideas for building an inclusive classroom

- ▶ Welcome each person individually, even in an online classroom
- ▶ Collaborate with students to set expectations for participation in the class:
  - ▶ Ask students about what isn't working and adjust accordingly
  - ▶ Create rules of engagement to support a safe learning environment for all
- ▶ If students don't share video, encourage students to include their pictures:
  - ▶ If a student is concerned about how their home will look on video, encourage them to sit against a wall as a backdrop or use a built-in function in their virtual classroom platform
- ▶ Small groups – appoint and rotate a team leader for each group to speak on behalf of their group
- ▶ Schedule a consistent meeting time to complete small group work outside of live class time, so students with limited access can plan ahead
- ▶ Consider allowing both chat and video responses and ask students to shorten responses to one to two sentences to enable more participation and response
- ▶ Use a variety of participation techniques and consider offering alternative means of participation, such as:
  - ▶ Breakout groups
  - ▶ Chats
  - ▶ Whiteboarding
  - ▶ Live polling
- ▶ Paraphrase responses by students to show that their contributions are valued, share their name and encouragement when doing so, and ensure that all individuals follow the questions and responses
- ▶ Keep track of students called on to ensure that there is space for all to participate
- ▶ Leave longer pauses that may even feel awkward, as pauses allow for the chance for all to respond
- ▶ When checking for understanding, consider polling, video-based thumbs up or another method and check that all respond, not just a few students
- ▶ Ask: "what points of view have I not heard yet?"
- ▶ Don't assume a learner's ability, success or contribution based on how one looks or their virtual environment
- ▶ Include breaks with a timer, even during digital sessions
- ▶ Follow up with students who miss class within 24 hours:
  - ▶ For some students, a natural inclination can be to retreat when they get behind, so outreach can help.
  - ▶ Some students are using their expensive cell data outside the US and have unreliable access to the internet or a computer.
  - ▶ Be aware of signs of stress that you or your students may have.

## Supporting virtual infrastructure

- ▶ Plan to record classes if you meet live
- ▶ Check if students have the right tools and consider providing support:
  - ▶ Broadband availability and headsets
- ▶ Have security in place to avoid unauthorized attendees
- ▶ Work with your institution to migrate courses to high-quality online offerings (vs. remote learning)
- ▶ Give other options for participation for those that can't participate live
- ▶ When possible, use tools with built-in accessibility and functionality, including closed captioning

Per the Brookings Institution, as of 2018:

1 out of 4  
US households  
do not have wired high-  
speed internet at home or  
rely on a mobile-only  
connection

47.9 million  
students were affected by  
104,000  
school closures in the US

Source: Lara Fishbane and Adie Tomer, "As classes move online during COVID-19, what are disconnected students to do?" Brookings Institution, March 2020

## Hear what other faculty and students say about checking in

- ▶ Do not wait: be open to discussing current events, along with what has happened, and share concern for its impact
- ▶ As it's natural for us to feel uncertain about what to say or how to say it, ask: "are you ok?" and "what can I do to support you?"
- ▶ Listen without judgment, interruption or reaction and don't feel the need to have answers
- ▶ Don't be offended if a student doesn't want to talk or have a lengthy conversation
- ▶ Feel free to pause in response and share why: "I am pausing because I just don't know what to say," or "I am pausing because I want to learn more."

“

Our staff and faculty have been working around the clock to ensure students have answers to the various questions and scenarios we might face moving forward ... check-ins have become more frequent via text with students.

“

I've had regular check-ins with students, including nearly 100 individual emails to check on students' overall well-being. I continue to recognize that each student is unique and that some have returned home to a very challenging and stress-filled environment.

“

More bonding activities at the beginning of the year and encourage more peer-to-peer collaboration.

“

Ensure that faculty and staff are compassionate and creative with teaching students in a virtual setting.

## Diversity and inclusiveness drive performance

### Innovation

**3.5x**

more likely to contribute to their full innovative potential

Source: Sylvia Ann Hewlett, Melinda Marshall and Laura Sherbin with Tara Gonsalves, *Innovation, Diversity and Market Growth*, Center for Talent Innovation, 2013

### Team collaboration

**57%**

better collaboration

Source: *Driving Performance and Retention Through Employee Engagement*, Corporate Leadership Council, 2008

### Business performance

**Up 6 points**

higher gross margin collaboration

**Up 10 points**

higher revenue growth

Source: *Driving Performance and Retention Through Employee Engagement*, Corporate Leadership Council, 2008

### Psychological safety is

**80% higher**

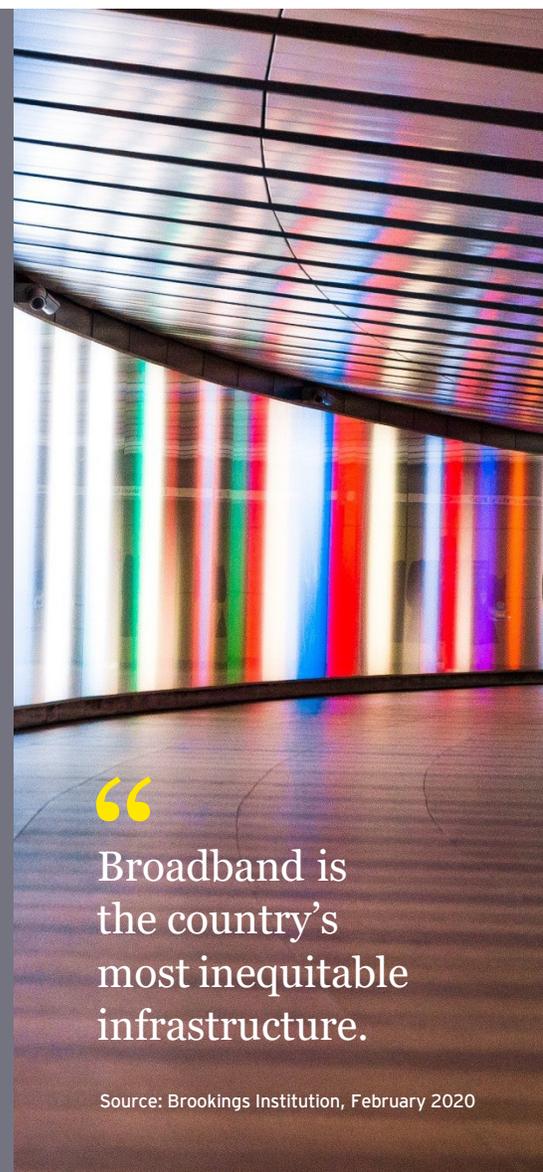
among employees who perceived that their leaders demonstrated empowerment, accountability, courage and humility behaviors most often

Source: Catalyst research, 2015

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Broadband is the country's most inequitable infrastructure.

Source: Brookings Institution, February 2020



People at high-trust companies report:

**74%**  
less stress

**40%**  
less burnout

**106%**  
more energy

**76%**  
more engagement

**50%**  
resulting in higher productivity

Source: Paul J. Zak, "The Neuroscience of Trust," *Harvard Business Review*, January 2017

# Ask

Who am I consistently **calling on**?

Who hasn't been to class, and how can I **follow up**?

How can I **engage all students** to participate, so all students can share their perspectives?

# Consider

Your own **personal biases**

**Being explicit** about the importance of valuing different perspectives

# Additional resources

[ey.com/differencesmatter](https://ey.com/differencesmatter)

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