

**Proposed Lynnfield Anti-Hate Task Force
Community Conversation Reflection Summary**
(April 30, 2026)

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Proposed Members to be presented to the Selectboard or 5/4

1. Select Board Chair Alexis Leahy or other appointed SB member
2. Adam Federico, Lynnfield Public Schools Asst. Superintendent and acting LMS Principal
3. Jessica Tortola, Family Engagement Specialist A Healthy Lynnfield and Lynnfield Public Schools
4. Ruth Buxton - Centre Congregational Church
5. Lynnfield Police Dept. Representative
6. Michael (Mickey) Sweeney, Lynnfield High School Sophomore
7. Jamie Hayman
8. Wendy Dixon
9. Narin Paul
10. Sam Jennings
11. Mwangi Gathoni

Purpose of This Summary

This document reflects themes, insights, and lived experiences shared during the recent community conversation. All comments have been anonymized and synthesized to honor both the depth of individual voices and the collective story emerging across the community.

This is not a final statement, it is a living reflection intended to:

- Surface what we are hearing
- Name patterns honestly
- Identify opportunities for growth and action

Key Community Takeaways

Across conversations (From the 4.7.26 Community Meeting), several core themes emerged:

- Belonging is built through relationships
- Experiences of exclusion follow recognizable patterns
- Systems are perceived as inconsistent and lacking accountability
- Fear and silence often prevent action
- Trust across systems is low
- Youth experiences are shaped by and reflect adult systems

What We May Have Missed (Emerging Insights)

Listening as Action

Participants emphasized that listening itself is not neutral: it is an act that requires intention.

- For some families, “listening” has historically meant silence without validation
 - There is a need to acknowledge harm without rushing to solutions
 - Feeling heard requires both:
 - Being listened to
 - Having experiences named and validated
- Opportunity: Strengthen how the community practices actively, validating listening especially for those most impacted by non-belonging.

Modeling Belonging Across Generations

- Adults play a critical role in modeling how to acknowledge difference and hold space for discomfort
- At the same time, youth are already navigating these realities and can teach adults how systems are experienced today
- Belonging is not taught in isolation, it is co-created between generations.

Beyond Schools: A Community-Wide Responsibility

- Experiences of belonging and exclusion are not confined to schools
- Community institutions including public services and civic spaces play a role
- Belonging must be understood as a town-wide responsibility, not a school-based issue alone.

The Role of Denial

A strong theme emerged around the difficulty of naming issues directly:

- Discomfort with terms like “racism” can lead to:
 - Softening language
 - Avoiding acknowledgment
- This can unintentionally minimize lived experiences
- When issues are not named clearly, they risk being invisible especially to those most impacted.

Coded Language and Hidden Divides

Participants reflected on how language can signal belonging or exclusion, including:

- References to geography, housing, or longevity in town
- Assumptions about class, profession, or lifestyle
- Social groupings that are implicitly understood but rarely discussed openly. These patterns contribute to invisible boundaries that shape community experience.

Welcoming and Inclusion

- Being “new” can feel like a barrier to belonging
- Some community members described needing to navigate systems without clear entry points
- Inclusion often depends on informal networks rather than accessible structures

Shifts in Visibility and Safety

- Participants noted changes over time in how safe it feels to be visibly part of certain identity groups

- In some cases, belonging has shifted from visible and collective to private and selective
- Individuals often rely on trusted people rather than trusted systems.

What Resonated Most

Several themes deeply resonated across participants:

Fear and Silence

- Many individuals hesitate to speak up due to:
 - Fear of making situations worse
 - Concern about social consequences
- There is tension between:
 - “Speaking up”
 - Perceptions of “causing problems”

Accountability and Shared Responsibility

- Participants acknowledged that:
 - Systems are not separate from people
 - Community members themselves play a role in shaping experiences
 - There is a desire to move from **blame to shared ownership**.

Engaging Beyond the “Echo Chamber”

- A key question emerged:
How do we engage those who are not currently participating in these conversations?
- There is a strong desire to:
 - Include differing perspectives
 - Avoid reinforcing only like-minded spaces
 - Build broader community buy-in

Where Belonging Currently Exists

Participants identified spaces that foster belonging:

- Arts and creative communities
- Certain community gathering traditions
- Informal networks and relationships

However, these spaces often:

- Require opt-in participation
- Become less accessible or sustainable over time
- Compete with other systems (e.g., scheduling conflicts)

Where Belonging May Be Missing

Lack of “Third Spaces”

A significant theme was the absence of accessible, informal gathering spaces:

- Limited places for youth and adults to gather outside structured activities
- Few consistent, community-centered environments for connection
- Barriers related to cost, access, and availability
- This absence impacts both connection and community cohesion.

Structural and Resource Constraints

- Limited shared spaces (e.g., recreation, community centers)
- Challenges sustaining ongoing programming
- Community initiatives often occur as one-time events rather than continuous opportunities

Symbolic Representation

- Questions emerged about:
 - Visibility of inclusive symbols
 - Policies that may unintentionally limit expression
 - Representation plays a role in signaling who belongs and who is seen.

Holding Complexity: Who Lynnfield Is Today

Participants also named an important truth:

- Lynnfield is experienced as both:
 - A place with positive, meaningful experiences
 - A place where not everyone feels they fully belong

These realities exist at the same time. Youth, in particular, often:

- Navigate this complexity with awareness
- Experience both connection and exclusion simultaneously

A Community Reflection

A powerful distinction emerged:

Many are not saying, *“I feel unsafe here.”*

More often, the experience is:

“I don’t always feel like I belong here.”

Looking Ahead

This conversation surfaces both challenge and possibility.

Opportunities moving forward include:

- Strengthening trust and transparency in systems
- Expanding spaces for connection and community life
- Building shared language and understanding
- Engaging a broader range of voices including those not yet at the table
- Supporting both individual action and systemic change
- Compete with other commitments and systems

Next Steps

Board charge and proposed members will be presented to the Select Board on 5/4 for approval. All future meetings will follow Open Meeting laws if approved.