

4/7 Community Conversation KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Belonging is built through relationships, not just programs
- Exclusion follows predictable patterns tied to identity and access
- Systems are seen as inconsistent and lacking accountability
- Fear and silence prevent people from speaking up
- Trust is low due to lack of visible action
- Youth experiences reflect adult behavior and systems
- The community wants ongoing, meaningful, and measurable change

OVERARCHING THEMES & PATTERNS

1. Belonging Happens Through Personal Connection & Recognition

Core idea: People feel like they belong when they are *seen, invited, and valued as individuals*.

What we heard:

- Personal invitations matter (“we want you here”)
- Being remembered, recognized, and listened to
- Shared interests (clubs, sports, faith, parenting, neighborhoods)
- Feeling safe to be your authentic self
- Having someone “stand up for you” or “have your back”

Pattern: Belonging is not abstract—it is relational, intentional, and interpersonal.

Task Force:

- Focus on micro-actions (inviting, welcoming, noticing)
- Build systems that normalize outreach and connection

2. Barriers to Belonging Are Structural AND Social

Core idea: Belonging breaks down both because of systems that don’t work and social dynamics that exclude.

A. Structural/System Barriers

- Lack of clear policies or inconsistent enforcement
- Perceived lack of accountability or follow-through
- Limited representation in leadership

- Communication gaps (town, schools, resources)
- Barriers to participation (timing, access, awareness)
- Inequities (housing, socioeconomic differences, METCO disconnect)

B. Social/Cultural Barriers

- “Inner circle” or closed community feeling
- Fear of speaking up
- Normalization of harmful behavior (“jokes,” bullying)
- Assumptions and profiling
- Resistance to change / “this is how it’s always been”

Pattern: People don’t just feel excluded socially—they feel excluded by systems that should protect and include them.

Task Force must address both:

- Policy + accountability
- Culture + behavior change

3. Exclusion Follows a Clear Pattern (“The Lynnfield Profile”)

Core idea: There is a widely perceived “default identity” that defines who belongs.

Groups most often identified as feeling excluded:

- People of color
- METCO students and families
- LGBTQ+ individuals
- Neurodivergent individuals
- People with lower socioeconomic status or renters
- New residents
- People without children
- Those outside dominant social groups (e.g., not in sports)
- Those with different beliefs, languages, or backgrounds

Pattern:

- If you don’t fit the perceived norm (white, affluent, long-time resident), belonging is harder.
- Exclusion is predictable, not random.

Task Force:

- This is not just about “inclusion efforts”—it requires disrupting a defined norm

- Representation and visibility matter deeply

4. Silence, Fear, and Inaction Are Major Drivers of Harm

Core idea: People know there are issues—but don't feel safe or supported to act.

What we heard:

- Fear of speaking up or being targeted
- Lack of upstanders
- People are vocal online but not in real life
- People in power not taking action
- Victims sometimes harmed by the response
- Minimization or denial (“this doesn't happen here”)

Pattern: The biggest barrier isn't awareness—it's lack of action and protection for those who speak up.

Task Force:

- Build safe reporting and response systems
- Normalize and train bystander behavior
- Ensure no retaliation / fair response

5. Trust Is Broken Due to Lack of Accountability & Follow-Through

Core idea: People do not trust systems because they don't see consistent action.

What we heard:

- “System isn't working”
- Promises not fulfilled
- Inconsistent consequences
- Lack of transparency
- Leadership not present or responsive
- Gaslighting or dismissing experiences

Pattern: Trust erodes when -

- There's no visible change
- Responses are inconsistent or unclear

Task Force:

- Prioritize transparent processes

- Set clear timelines and measurable actions
- Communicate progress consistently

6. Youth Experience Is Central—and Influenced by Adults

Core idea: Youth belonging reflects adult behavior, systems, and modeling.

What we heard:

- Bullying, cyberbullying, social media influence
- Social grouping (especially in sports)
- Youth lacking confidence to engage
- Kids can be inclusive—but aren't always supported
- Adults sometimes model exclusion or avoidance

Pattern:

- Youth issues are community issues
- Adults shape norms (directly and indirectly)

Task Force:

- Invest in:
 - Adult training (not just student programs)
 - Youth voice and leadership
 - Early education (elementary level)

7. Belonging Requires Ongoing, Intentional Community Work

Core idea: One-time efforts are not enough—this must be continuous and visible.

What we heard:

- Need for ongoing conversations (not one event)
- Desire for action teams and focus groups
- Importance of cultural celebrations and shared experiences
- Need for proactive—not reactive—work

Pattern: Community members are ready—but want structure, continuity, and action.

Task Force:

- Create sustained infrastructure, not one-off initiatives

Task Force Timeline

- Applications live 4/14
- Deadline to submit applications 4/20
- Application review by a diverse group of leaders, residents and organizations, 4/21-4/26
- Notify people by 4/27
- 1st meeting - week of April 27th
- Update the public by May 1st