Work-based Learning (WBL) in Montana, Belonging in the Workplace Summary

Belonging refers to the feeling that **you matter to the group and that you are valued for who you are and what you bring.**

When youth and young adults feel a sense of belonging, they can thrive.

Benefits

Belonging in the workplace is linked to reduced employee turnover. Employees who feel a sense of belonging also show increased persistence through challenges and greater innovation. They are better able to bounce back after failure, and are less likely to be thrown off by shifts or changes within the company.

80%

of students, **agree** that they **feel welcomed** and included **at their workplace**.

Research shows that belonging improves brain functioning and mood; promotes mental health and emotional well-being; promotes self-esteem, life satisfaction, academic success, and resilience; reduces absenteeism and likelihood of dropout and attrition; improves memory retention; and enhances learning.

ASPEN INSTITUTE FORUM FOR COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS

> **My boss gave me a space all to myself and put a picture** of me on the employee wall.

1 in 3

students does not feel comfortable expressing themselves at work.



Work-based Learning Collaborative MONTANA

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To learn more, visit **wblmt.org**

Youth Experience: Belonging in the Workplace

Montana high school students responded to statements regarding their sense of belonging during a work experience or work-based learning experience. They selected a number on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) through 5 (strongly agree).

Many students feel welcomed, valued, and supported in their workplace:

- **Approximately 80% of students** agree or strongly agree that they feel welcomed and included at their workplace.
- **70% agree** or strongly agree that their employer organization values them and their contributions.
- **Roughly 70%–75% of students** agree or strongly agree that they have satisfying relationships with coworkers.
- **Over 80% of students** agree or strongly agree to "I understand how the company or organization works".

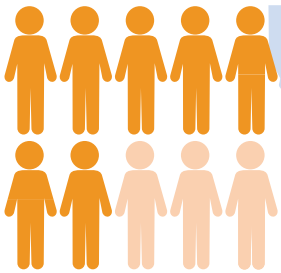
- **Times when students feel like they belong:**
  - "When my boss gave me a space all to myself and put a picture up of me [on the employee wall]."
  - "I was given tasks that allowed me to fit work into my school schedule."
  - "People validating my ideas and being willing to try new things."

> **When people don't listen** to my reasonings for why I do things the way I do.

For more information on the framework around Belonging, Meaning, Wellbeing, and Purpose, please visit aspencommunitysolutions.org/bmwp/.

The Montana Work-based Learning Collaborative (WBLC) is a cross-section of 30 public and private sector organizations working to improve, enhance, and expand work-based learning in Montana.

This information was collected via small focus groups facilitated by WBLC members. Over 500 Montana high school students, primarily 11-12 grades, participated from all school sizes and from rural, tribal, and urban areas in spring 2025.



70%
of students,
agree that their
employer values them.

Yet, many youth do not feel comfortable expressing themselves in work spaces:

- **One in three students** does not feel comfortable expressing themselves and being their authentic selves at work.
- **Almost 40% of students** do not agree with the statement "I Feel Like I Really Belong".
- **Neutral responses** are most common in questions related to belonging, identity, and self-expression.

- **Times when students do not feel like they belong:**
  - "People looked down on me for being younger/less experienced. They wouldn't allow mistakes or trials without judgment."
  - "I work with all boys so being a girl makes me feel not included sometimes."
  - "When people don't listen to my reasonings for why I do things the way I do."

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For more information, **contact Gabrielle Rowley** at growley@ReachHigherMontana.org or (406) 422-6809 or visit **wblmt.org**