

Belonging

the newsletter from the *FIRST* NC ED&I Team – October 2026

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.

Building a team where new students belong

At the heart of *FIRST* is the idea that we are building more than robots—we are building people, teams, and communities. Every time a new student walks into a team meeting, they are entering a new community with its own traditions, relationships, and ways of doing things. Creating a welcoming environment is an important part of making sure every student has an opportunity to experience what *FIRST* has to offer.

As teams welcome new students, whether they are entering their first year of high school or joining *FIRST* for the first time, creating a sense of belonging should be intentional. A new student may have years of robotics experience, no technical experience at all, or simply be looking for a place to connect with others. Team-building activities can help break down those barriers and make it easier for everyone to find their place.

Think beyond traditional icebreakers and try activities that encourage students to interact in new ways. Pair new and returning members for a “teach me something” challenge, where each person teaches the other a skill they know. Create rotating small groups so students regularly work with people outside their usual sub team. Try a team scavenger hunt, collaborative trivia, “two truths and a lie,” or a challenge where students have to build or create something using limited materials. The activity itself matters less than creating opportunities for students to talk, laugh, collaborate, and learn about one another.

Belonging can also be built into the everyday culture of the team. Create a “team interests” board where students can share hobbies, favorite music, games, sports, or things they would like to learn. Host occasional team meals or social activities where students intentionally sit with someone they do not know well. Consider a “What I Bring to the Team” activity where students identify skills, interests, or experiences they can contribute—even if those skills have nothing to do with robotics.

Most importantly, don't assume that students will automatically find their place. Check in with new members, introduce them to others, invite them into conversations, and give them opportunities to contribute early. A team becomes more inclusive when belonging is something we build together—not something we expect new students to find on their own.

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

From FIRST: Just in case you missed it! – Systemcore Pricing and Availability

Today, we're excited to announce that Systemcore units will be available for *FIRST* Robotics Competition teams to purchase via the *FIRST*® Storefront beginning on November 18, 2026. There will eventually be two versions of Systemcore available for purchase:

1. one with a 4 GB RAM Raspberry Pi Compute Module 5 for \$550, and
2. one with a 2 GB RAM Raspberry Pi Compute Module 5 for \$450.

4 GB Systemcores will go on sale November 18 and should begin shipping at that time. 2 GB Systemcores will go on sale later this year, with specific dates announced via the blog.

All *FIRST* Robotics Competition teams will receive a 4 GB Systemcore in the 2027 Season Specific Box of the Kickoff Kit and will be required to use Systemcore for the 2027 season. To help ensure *FIRST* Robotics Competition teams have access to additional Systemcore units to start the season, the initial batch of Systemcore will only be available for purchase to registered and secured *FIRST* Robotics Competition teams via the *FIRST* Storefront, and each team can purchase only one 4 GB Systemcore. This limit may be removed once initial demand has passed. Once additional inventory is on hand, Systemcores will be available for purchase from multiple companies within the *FIRST* ecosystem.

Read more [HERE](#)

Holidays and Events:

October's observances celebrate diversity, inclusion, awareness, and belonging.

Global Diversity Awareness Month – Celebrates the richness of diversity and the importance of inclusion in communities and workplaces.

National Disability Employment Awareness Month (U.S.) – Recognizes the contributions of workers with disabilities and promotes inclusive workplaces.

Filipino American History Month (U.S.) – Honoring the history, legacy, and contributions of Filipino Americans.

Italian American Heritage Month (U.S.) – Celebrating Italian American culture and heritage.

LGBTQ+ History Month (U.S.) – Recognizing the history, struggles, and achievements of LGBTQ+ communities.

Oct 1 – International Coffee Day – A global excuse to enjoy your favorite brew.

Oct 2 – International Day of Non-Violence – Commemorates the birthday of Mahatma Gandhi, promoting peace and tolerance.

Oct 2 – World Smile Day – A reminder that kindness and a smile can brighten the day.

Oct 5 – World Teachers' Day – Thank a teacher who's made a difference.

Oct 10 – World Mental Health Day – Raises awareness of mental health issues and mobilizes support.

Oct 11 – National Coming Out Day (U.S.) – Honors LGBTQ+ people living openly and authentically.

Oct 11 – International Day of the Girl Child – Recognize girl children's rights, amplify their voices, and address unique gender-based challenges worldwide.

Oct 12 – National Farmers Day – Appreciating those who grow the food that sustains us.

Oct 12 – Indigenous Peoples' Day (U.S.) – Honors the history, cultures, and resilience of Indigenous communities.

Oct 16 – World Food Day – Highlights global efforts to end hunger.

Oct 17 – International Day for the Eradication of Poverty – Acknowledges the struggles of people living in poverty and calls for action.

Oct 24 – United Nations Day – Marks the anniversary of the UN Charter coming into force in 1945.

Oct 27 – World Pasta Day – Because who doesn't love pasta?

Oct 30 – National Checklist Day – Celebrate the humble checklist that keeps us organized.

Oct 31 – Halloween – A playful holiday rooted in folklore and tradition.

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

Inspiration & Recognition Spotlight: *Jenny Lay-Flurrie*



Jenny Lay-Flurrie leads accessibility efforts at Microsoft, helping teams design technology that more people can use. Her work offers a useful reminder for robotics teams: people bring different experiences, strengths, and needs to a shared challenge. When we make it easier for everyone to participate, we gain more ideas and more ways to solve problems.

As new students join your team this fall, think about how they are welcomed into the work. Do they know whom to ask for help? Can they try a role before choosing a subteam? Is there more than one way to share an idea? Building a strong team starts with making room for each person to contribute.

Read more about **Jenny Lay-Flurrie** - [HERE](#)

ED&I Training: *Make the invitation specific*

“Jump in whenever you’re ready” sounds welcoming, but a new student may not know where to begin. They may be unsure which tools they can use, whether it is okay to interrupt, or if their idea is ready to share.

Give them a clear, manageable way to contribute: “Would you sketch one idea for the intake?” “Can you help me test these two settings?” or “Will you explain what our group tried?” These invitations show the student that their help is wanted and give them a place to start.

Then make room for the student to do the task. Offer guidance without taking over, listen to their observations, and acknowledge what they contributed. At the next meeting, invite them to try a different role. Small, specific invitations can help a new student move from watching the team to feeling part of it.

The *FIRST* NC ED&I Team: Contact us at: 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.

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