

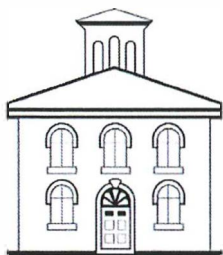


YOUR VOICE IS NEEDED IN

# CULTIVATING BELONGING IN SCHOOLS

## WORLD CAFE

A discussion model that encourages small group conversations within a larger gathering. Share your stories and perspectives, and help generate actionable steps around increasing school belonging.



Facilitated by:

**DR. RACHAEL MAHMOOD**

2024 ILLINOIS TEACHER OF THE YEAR

**March 19, 2025**

**5-7:30PM**

**Roosevelt Middle School  
7560 Oak Ave, River Forest IL**

Click [Here](#) to RSVP

## Dr. Rachael Mahmood

2024 ILLINOIS TEACHER OF THE YEAR



**“We have the collective agency and wisdom to create educational spaces that embrace belonging for all”**

### KEYNOTE (30- 60 MINS)

#### **S.H.A.P.E. ing a Culture of Belonging in Education**

In this keynote, Dr. Mahmood shares her journey —from a struggling student searching for belonging to an educator who embraces her identity as a teaching superpower.

Discover her 5 transformative strategies that not only keep her passionate about being a teacher, but also can help S.H.A.P.E. a school culture of belonging.

Through personal stories, vulnerability, and humor, Dr. Mahmood will equip you to celebrate diversity, implement practical instructional strategies, and foster positive, inclusive learning environments.

This keynote can be delivered in 15, 30, or 45-minute segments. It can also be paired with the PD session *Cultivating Belonging: Engaging Our School Community Through Dialogue* and/or a meet and greet.

### MEET AND GREETINGS & VISITS

Dr. Mahmood offers personalized meet-and-greet sessions for your school, district, or organization. These informal gatherings can begin with a brief inspirational message, followed by an open discussion where Dr. Mahmood listens to feedback from educators and answers questions (1-3 hours).

As part of her visit, Dr. Mahmood enjoys spending time in classrooms, interacting with educators/students, fostering relationships, and promoting messages of belonging.

### INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE SESSION

#### **Cultivating Belonging: Engaging Our School Community Through Dialogue and Action**

*How do we ensure that our students, our educators, and our families all feel a sense of belonging in our schools?* The answer to this question already exists in your school community. Let’s elevate your community’s voice and wisdom to bring those ideas to action.

Dr. Mahmood will help you plan and facilitate a 2-3 hour World Café for your school community exploring the central question above.

The World Café is a dialogue model where educators, students, and/or community members gather in small groups to discuss a central question. Participants record their feedback and findings in small groups. After a set time, individuals rotate to different groups, carrying forward key insights and ideas from each round of their discussions. Through multiple rounds of conversation, diverse perspectives are shared, and all stakeholders are given a space to provide actionable steps to address the question above.

At the end of the session, the collective wisdom of your group emerges and your participants will have generated relevant, tailored, and innovative solutions to increasing feelings of belonging in your school community. This event can accommodate 30 to 300+ participants in one session.

### PODCAST INTERVIEW

Elevate the educators making a difference in your school, district, or organization. Have Dr. Mahmood interview them for her upcoming podcast sharing insights, projects, and/or success stories of passionate educators across Illinois (30-60 Minutes).

Click this [Link](#) to Request a Session with the Teacher of the Year



2024 ILLINOIS TEACHER OF THE YEAR IS LOOKING TO SCHEDULE  
50 WORLD CAFE'S ACROSS THE STATE

# WORLD CAFE GUIDE

## WHAT IS A WORLD CAFE?


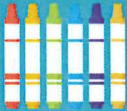
A World Café is a structured conversational process intended to facilitate open and intimate discussions and to link ideas within a larger group to access the collective wisdom in the room. It is often used in organizational and community settings to foster collaborative dialogue, share knowledge, and generate innovative solutions to complex issues.




## WHAT IS THE CENTRAL QUESTION?

How do we ensure that our students, our educators, and our families all feel a sense of belonging in our schools?

## WHAT DO WE NEED TO PURCHASE?

- Sticky Easel Pad, White 
- Paper/Butcher Paper 25 in x 30 in  
one piece of paper per table
- 4 markers per table 
- Food/drinks/napkins
- Tablecloths/decorations


## HOW DO WE SET UP THE ROOM?

- Tables that seat 4-8 people 
- Tablecloths/centerpieces
- Cafe food items on a buffet table: water, coffee, chips, cookies, muffins, etc.
- Microphone, screen, projector
- Decorations like student art, student band playing in the corner

## WHAT IS THE AGENDA?

- Introduction (Administration - 5 min)
- Keynote on Belonging from Dr. Mahmood (15 min)
- World Cafe Logistics (5 min)
- Four Rounds of 12-15 min Dialogue
- Conclusion/Thank you (5 min)
- Museum Gallery Showing of Notes (20 min)
- Exit Ticket via Google Forms (10 min)

## WHAT CAN WE DO WITH THE DATA?

Each organization will keep their World Café tablecloth notes and data from the Google form. These insights can be used to shape organizational goals, action plans, or yearly professional development topics. The data can also be transformed into an infographic to display in buildings, highlighting participants' voices. 

CLICK THIS [LINK](#) TO REQUEST A WORLD CAFE SESSION  
QUESTIONS? EMAIL: MAHMOOD.ILSTOY24@GMAIL.COM

# NEWS

**For Immediate Release**

September 7, 2024

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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## **Illinois 2024 Teacher of the Year Launches Platform to Cultivate Sense of Belonging in School Communities**

*Dr. Rachael Mahmood to engage 50 school districts in statewide initiative aimed at enhancing school culture*

**SPRINGFIELD** – The 2024 Illinois Teacher of the Year, Dr. Rachael Mahmood, today announced her platform, "Cultivating Belonging: Engaging School Community through Dialogue and Action." Her initiative will bring educators, students, and families across the state together to foster a greater sense of belonging within school communities. Dr. Mahmood's platform aims to serve 50 school districts during the 2024-25 school year via events called [World Cafés](#), which are designed to spark meaningful dialogue and action leading to tangible improvements in school culture, student achievement, family satisfaction, and teacher retention.

Schools and districts can sign up for free Word Café facilitation by Dr. Mahmood using [this form](#).

"Creating a positive school culture and climate is not just an aspirational goal – it is the foundation for academic achievement and a critical factor in supporting teacher retention," **said State Superintendent Dr. Tony Sanders**. "I applaud Dr. Mahmood's work in fostering a sense of belonging within our school communities. When educators, students, and families feel truly connected and valued, we set the stage for success so students can thrive and grow."

"Every educator has a unique story about what drew them to teaching and why they choose to stay," **said Dr. Mahmood**. "The World Café model draws out these powerful stories, inviting educators to share their experiences and ideas, helping to identify meaningful actions that increase belonging and strengthen the profession. Belonging is deeply personal, and the key to understanding what it takes for

educators to join and remain in the profession lies in listening to their stories and suggestions."

The World Café is an innovative discussion model that encourages small group conversations within a larger gathering. Participants share their stories and perspectives, generating actionable steps around the pivotal question: How do we ensure that every educator, student, and family feels a sense of belonging in our schools?

Dr. Mahmood's platform is deeply rooted in her own experiences as a multicultural student and later as a teacher who grappled with finding a sense of belonging in her school environments. It was through participating in World Cafés in her home school district — where she sat side-by-side with administrators, educators, and parents — that she first truly felt valued, heard, and connected within her community.

[Research](#) shows that when students, educators, and families feel a deep connection to their school community, there are significant benefits, including higher student achievement, increased graduation rates, and improved teacher retention.

Dr. Mahmood will facilitate 50 World Cafés across Illinois in an effort to create a ripple effect of positive change. During these events, participants will engage in multiple rounds of conversation, rotating between groups to share and build upon key insights. This process will help identify patterns, uncover perceptions, and inform school improvement plans that are both personal and relevant to each unique community.

Each World Café will culminate in a collective synthesis of ideas, allowing participants to generate tailored, innovative solutions that address the needs of their school communities. The capacity to accommodate groups at these events, which are designed to be inclusive so that all voices are heard, ranges from 30 to over 300 participants.

#### **About Dr. Rachel Mahmood**

Dr. Rachael Mahmood, a teacher at Indian Prairie Community Unit School District 204, was [named](#) the 2024 Illinois Teacher of the Year by Illinois State Superintendent Dr. Tony Sanders in May. In this role, Dr. Mahmood is sharing her knowledge and expertise by serving an ambassadorship which began in July. She is taking a state-funded one-year sabbatical for the 2024-25 school year. Dr. Mahmood, who has 20 years of experience in the classroom and a deep commitment to creating inclusive learning environments, is dedicated to ensuring that every member of the school community feels a true sense of belonging.

Learn more about engagement opportunities with Dr. Mahmood on this [flyer](#) or fill out a [request form](#).

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