

Dr. Mishkat Al Moumin: Who Gets to Belong in School?



[On the Road Again](#) is an exclusive monthly feature on our Roadmap 2031 initiative, written by Dr. Mishkat Al Moumin, a leading voice in thought leadership on the future of public education. We house her collective work on our dedicated [On the Road Again](#) page. Follow her there!

A student sits in the same classroom, follows the same schedule, and completes the same assignments as everyone else, yet still feels out of place. Not because of ability, but because the system was not designed with that student in mind.

Belonging is not Automatic; it is Built

Education should do more than deliver content. Education should help each student understand how they learn, what they need, and how to move forward with confidence and clarity. The role of education includes students who have been pushed to the margins, students who do not fit traditional pathways, and students whose strengths are often overlooked because they do not appear in test scores.

Building a culture where every student understands their learning and feels they belong is not abstract. Schools that choose to design differently are already building that culture and practicing it.

At High Tech High in California, students learn in mixed-ability classrooms where projects are designed to include multiple entry points. A student who struggles with writing may lead the design of a product. A student who processes information differently may take the lead in research or presentation. Special education is not separated from general education. It is integrated into the classroom, with co-teaching models and flexible project design. Students present their work publicly, and success is measured by contribution, growth, and the ability to explain the work, not just by a score.

The outcome is not only academic progress. Students who were once disengaged participate. Students who were labeled as struggling take on leadership roles. Classrooms reflect a wider range of strengths, and students learn how to work with differences rather than around them.



Inclusion does not lower expectations, but rather changes how those expectations are met.

Students in inclusive environments show stronger academic outcomes and better social development when compared to isolated settings. More importantly, they learn how to navigate a world that is not uniform. They build the ability to collaborate, communicate, and adapt. These are not secondary skills. They are essential.

A system that separates students based on narrow definitions of ability limits what each student can become. A system that creates space for different ways of learning expands it.

Belonging should not be Treated as an Add-on or a Program

It is part of how a school functions. It shows up in how classrooms are structured, how projects are designed, and how success is defined.

The question is not whether inclusion is possible. Inclusion is already in practice. The real question is whether inclusion is consistent, intentional, and accessible to every student.

The question is whether schools are willing to design for inclusion.

If belonging is present, students participate. If students participate, they grow. If they grow, they contribute.

What does belonging look like in a classroom, and how is it recognized when it is there?

Mishkat Al Moumin

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Mishkat Al Moumin is the Founder and President of [The Communication of Success](#), transforming the way individuals and organizations succeed by bridging gaps in communication, leadership, and strategy to overcome challenges, creating impact and growth. Mishkat is an active contributor to The Worthy Educator, and she is taking a lead role in the building of [Roadmap 2031](#). You can contact Mishkat via [email](#).

