

Belonging

the newsletter from the *FIRST* NC ED&I Team – September 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.

Every student has a place in FIRST!

Every student has a place in *FIRST*. Being part of a team is about more than building a robot—it is about finding a community where students feel valued, supported, and able to contribute. Not every student will be the programmer, builder, or driver, and that is okay. *FIRST* creates opportunities for students to find their strengths through outreach, scouting, design, media, business, strategy, and countless other roles.

Offseason outreach is one of the best ways to build that community beyond competition season. Hosting workshops, attending community events, mentoring younger teams, or simply bringing a robot into the community gives students opportunities to stay connected and continue sharing their passion. These experiences also help teams build relationships with one another and create a stronger *FIRST* community where students feel like they belong, even when there is no competition on the calendar.

Creating that sense of belonging also means intentionally supporting neurodiverse team members. Teams can make a meaningful difference by offering clear expectations, flexible ways to participate, predictable routines, and opportunities for students to communicate and contribute in ways that work best for them. Inclusion is not about making every student fit the same mold—it is about creating a team where different strengths, perspectives, and ways of thinking are recognized as assets.

When we make room for every student, continue building relationships in the offseason, and intentionally create an inclusive environment, we strengthen more than individual teams. We build a *FIRST* community where students can find their people, discover what they are capable of, and know that there is a place for them.

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! – Coach and Mentor Checklist

As a coach or mentor of a *FIRST*® team there is a lot to know about how to get started with your team as well as how to prepare yourself to be an effective *FIRST* volunteer. We are pleased to offer you this checklist to guide you on your way to joining the community.

[Step 1 – Become familiar with the Role of a Mentor](#)

[Step 2 - What are the Requirements to be a Mentor?](#)

[Step 3 – Connect with an Existing Team](#)

[Step 4 – Create a New Team](#)

[Step 5 – Invite Additional Mentors and Team Contacts to Your Team](#)

[Step 6 – Build Your Team Roster by Adding Participants](#)

[Step 7 – Review FIRST Training for Coaches and Mentors](#)

[Step 8 – Review Coach and Mentor Resources](#)

[Step 9 – How to Register to Participate in your Local FIRST event](#)

[Step 10 – Program Specific Resources for Coaches and Mentors](#)

Holidays and Events:

September 5 – International Day of Charity – A nice connection to offseason outreach, volunteering, and giving back to the community.

September 8 – International Literacy Day – Literacy includes more than reading and writing; communication, digital literacy, and access to information all affect how people participate and learn. UNESCO celebrates the day annually on September 8.

September 12 – National Video Games Day – Celebrate the programmers, artists, designers, strategists, and problem-solvers behind our favorite games.

September 13 – Programmers' Day – Especially good for FIRST. It falls on the 256th day of the year because 256 is, the number of possible values in an 8-bit byte.

September 15 – International Day of Democracy – A chance to reinforce that everyone's voice deserves an opportunity to be heard.

September 19 – Talk Like a Pirate Day – Completely unnecessary, which probably means it belongs in the calendar.

September 20 – World Cleanup Day – An excellent offseason outreach idea: organize a team cleanup at a school, park, or community space.

September 21 – International Day of Peace – Build teams where differences are handled with respect and Gracious Professionalism.

September 22 – Hobbit Day – Because even the smallest member of the fellowship can make a very big difference.

September 23 – International Day of Sign Languages – A particularly strong fit for this month's theme: communication isn't one-size-fits-all. The UN recognizes September 23 to promote awareness of sign languages and the rights of Deaf people.

September 28 – Good Neighbor Day – Perfect connection to community outreach: *What can your team do to be a good neighbor?*

September 30 – International Translation Day – Another reminder that accessible communication helps more people participate

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

Inspiration & Recognition Spotlight: Dr. Temple Grandin



Dr. Temple Grandin is a scientist, inventor, professor, author, and internationally recognized advocate for autism and neurodiversity. A visual thinker, she has used her distinctive way of seeing problems to transform livestock-handling systems and improve animal welfare around the world.

Grandin's career is an important reminder that there is no single "right" way to think, learn, communicate, or solve a problem. Different minds notice different things—and those differences can become extraordinary strengths when people are given opportunities to contribute.

That lesson fits naturally within *FIRST*. One student may visualize a mechanism before it is built, another may recognize a software pattern, another may communicate brilliantly with visitors, and another may quietly notice the detail everyone else missed. Strong teams don't ask everyone to think alike—they create space for different kinds of thinkers to succeed. Read more about **Dr. Temple Grandin** - [HERE](#)

ED&I Training: Make Room for Different Ways of Participating

Not every student learns, communicates, or participates in the same way. Some students thrive in a noisy brainstorming session, while others need time to process before responding. Some learn best from verbal instructions; others benefit from diagrams, written steps, demonstrations, or the opportunity to try something themselves.

Look for simple ways to offer more than one path to participation. Provide important instructions verbally and in writing. Give students advance notice when plans or schedules change. Break complicated tasks into clear steps. Create quieter spaces when possible, and don't assume that eye contact, constant conversation, or speaking up in a large group are signs of engagement.

Most importantly, get to know your students as individuals. Instead of asking, "Why aren't they participating like everyone else?" consider asking, "What would help this student participate successfully?"

Inclusive practices designed for neurodiverse students often make the team better for everyone.

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>