

Belonging

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

Reflect, Reset, Rebuild

As the competition season comes to a close, May gives us something we rarely have during build and competition, time to reflect and reset.

It's easy to measure a season by rankings, awards, or how far you advanced. But the most important work happens after the final match. This is where strong teams separate themselves, not by what they achieved, but by what they learn.

- What went well this season?
- Where did you struggle?
- What would you do differently if you could start again tomorrow?

Such questions can be challenging, yet they are essential for fostering genuine progress.

Belonging plays a critical role here. A team built on trust and respect can have honest conversations about improvement without blame. Students, mentors, and leaders all contribute to shaping the future. When people feel heard, they stay engaged. When they stay engaged, the team gets better.

And while the competition season may be over, your work is far from finished.

The months ahead are full of opportunity:

- **Outreach events** where you inspire the next generation and strengthen your community
- **Recruitment efforts** that welcome new members and new ideas into your team
- **Summer camps and demonstrations** that build confidence, leadership, and communication skills
- **Training and skill development** that turn experience into expertise

This is where you lay the foundation for next season.

It's also where innovation begins. Without the pressure of competition deadlines, you can revisit your robot, explore new designs, test bold ideas, and learn from the best, especially the teams you saw succeed at the highest level.

May is your starting point.

In the coming months, we'll take a deeper look at each of these areas, how to grow your team, strengthen your skills, expand your outreach, and continue building a culture where everyone belongs and can succeed.

The best teams don't wait for the next season to begin, they start building for it now.

Regardless of how far you went, each team stepped forward with courage, brought bold ideas to life, and left a lasting impact by inspiring others along the way. That is the work that truly mattered.

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

Holidays and Events:

May is Mental Health Awareness Month, also known as Mental Health Month (observed since 1949). Its aim is to raise awareness and educate the public about mental illnesses and reduce the stigma that surrounds mental illnesses.

May is also Asian/Pacific American Heritage Month, ALS Awareness Month, National Arthritis Awareness Month, National Foster Care Month, and Tourette Syndrome Awareness Month

May 1: Beltane is an ancient Celtic, Pagan, and Wiccan holiday celebrated about halfway between the spring equinox and summer solstice. The day is often used to celebrate love and romance.

May 1: International Workers' Day (Labor Day) - Celebrates the achievements and contributions of workers worldwide.

May 4 (nightfall) – 5 (nightfall): Lag BaOmer - A festive day on the Jewish calendar, celebrating the anniversary of the passing of the great sage and mystic Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, author of the Zohar.

May 5: Cinco de Mayo - Commemorates the Mexican Army's victory over the French Empire at the Battle of Puebla in 1862. Celebrated primarily in Mexico and the United States.

May 5: World Asthma Day - Recognized the first Tuesday of May, World Asthma Day is intended to raise awareness of asthma internationally and provide asthma education opportunities.

May 6: National Interpreter Appreciation Day - Recognizes and honors interpreters, and their role in helping people communicate across different languages and modes, such as sign language.

May 8: World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day - Recognizes the work of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in providing humanitarian aid and support worldwide.

May 10: Mother's Day - in the United States, Canada, Australia, and several other countries, Mother's Day is celebrated on the second Sunday in May (in the United Kingdom, Mother's Day is held on the fourth Sunday of Lent, which was March 10; in Mexico, Mother's day is on May 10 of every year).

May 12: International Nurses Day - Celebrates the contributions and sacrifices of nurses around the world and commemorates the birth anniversary of Florence Nightingale, the founder of modern nursing.

May 15: International Day of Families - Promotes awareness of issues relating to families and highlights their importance in nurturing and supporting individuals and communities.

May 17: International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia (IDAHOTB) - Raises awareness about discrimination and violence against LGBTQ+ individuals and promotes inclusion and acceptance.

May 21: World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development - Recognizes the importance of cultural diversity in promoting dialogue, understanding, and sustainable development.

May 22: International Day for Biological Diversity - Raises awareness about biodiversity issues and highlights the importance of conserving and protecting Earth's ecosystems.

May 25: Africa Day (formerly African Freedom Day and African Liberation Day) - Commemorates the founding of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963, which later became the African Union (AU).

May 25: Memorial Day in the United States is a federal holiday established to honor military veterans.

May 29: International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers - Honors the men and women who have served and continue to serve in UN peacekeeping operations and pays tribute to those who have lost their lives in the cause of peace.

May 31: World No Tobacco Day - Raises awareness about the health risks associated with tobacco use and advocates for effective policies to reduce tobacco consumption.

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

Inspiration & Recognition Spotlight: Dr. Aprille Ericsson



Dr. Aprille Ericsson is an aerospace engineer whose career reflects perseverance, curiosity, and a commitment to opening doors for others. She earned her bachelor's degree in aeronautical and astronautical engineering from MIT and later became the first Black woman to receive a Ph.D. in mechanical engineering from Howard University, as well as the first Black woman to receive a Ph.D. in engineering while working at NASA Goddard Space Flight Center.

Her work has supported major science and space missions, but her impact reaches far beyond technical achievement. Dr. Ericsson has also been a strong advocate for STEM outreach, mentoring, and encouraging young people, especially students from underrepresented backgrounds, to imagine themselves as future engineers, scientists, and innovators.

Watch more of Dr. Aprille Ericsson - [HERE](#)

ED&I and YPP Training: *FIRST STEM for Everyone*™ Youth Training

Youth leadership and youth voice are important to *FIRST*®. We are committed to helping young people develop leadership competencies to make them better able to solve community and societal problems. *FIRST* is *More Than Robots*®, and we want to make sure our students are equipped with the tools and knowledge to be successful beyond the classroom.

The *STEM for Everyone* Youth Training is for all *FIRST* students. It is designed to educate *FIRST* students about the importance of team building and provide strategies and recommendations to help *FIRST* create a more unified community.

The training includes an animation video and three modules. We reviewed module two last month so here is the third module:

[Module 3](#) provides solutions and suggestions to help students advocate and begin action planning to promote team unity in the *FIRST* community.

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>