

# Affirming and Validating Your Students and Staff

How to Communicate and Lead Effectively

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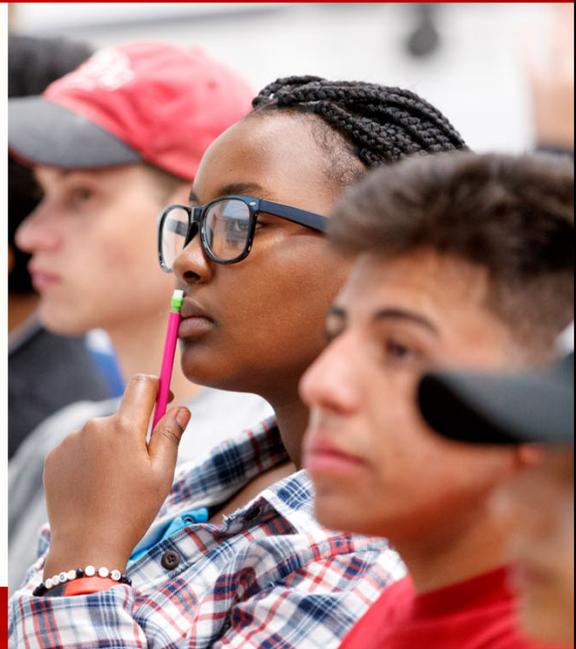
RMASFAA Past President

March 2026 | NeASFAA Conference

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## Why It Matters

- Students experience uncertainty, pressure, and belongingness concerns
- Staff experience burnout, complexity, and emotional labor
- How leaders communicate sets the tone for their experience



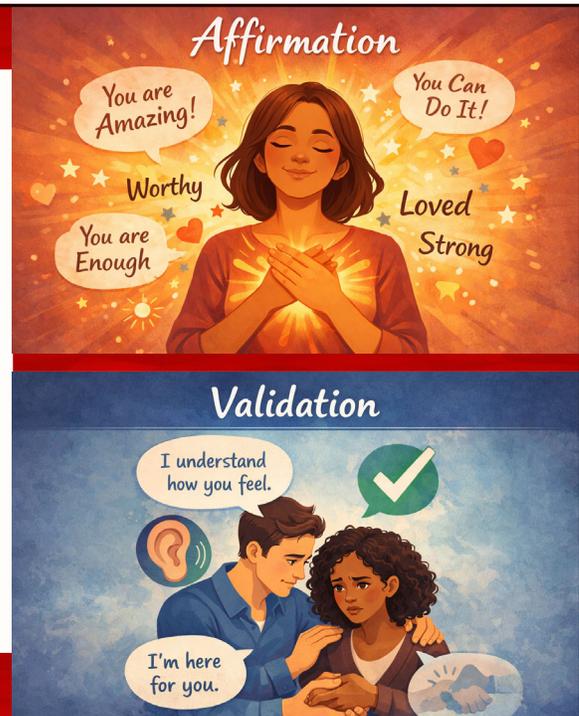
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## Affirmation vs Validation

- Affirmation: You matter and I will support you.
- Validation: I understand your experience.



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## Communication Gaps

- Transactional language
- Over-policy communication and compliance- or technical-driven language
- Lack of context
- Inconsistent messaging



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## Reframing Value Messaging

- Shifting from:
  - Cost to value
  - Process to outcome
  - Information to meaning
- Center the student (or staff)



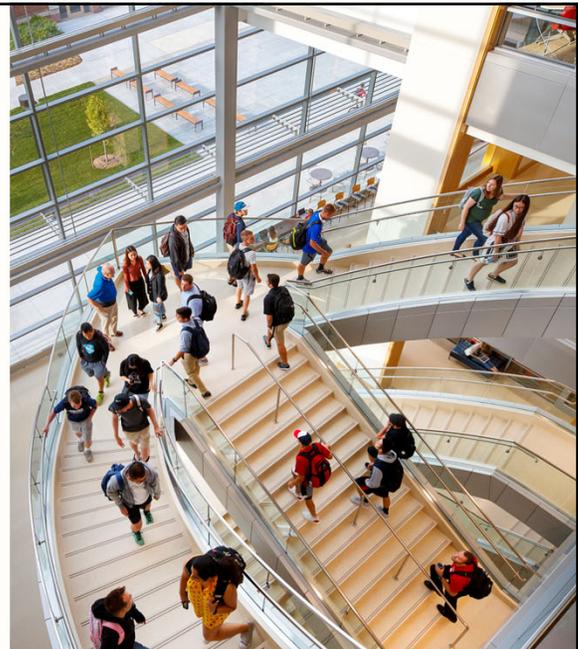
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## Leading Through Language

- Staff need:
  - Clarity, Consistency, Confidence
- Empower staff
- Reduce confusion with staff increases confidence of staff and students



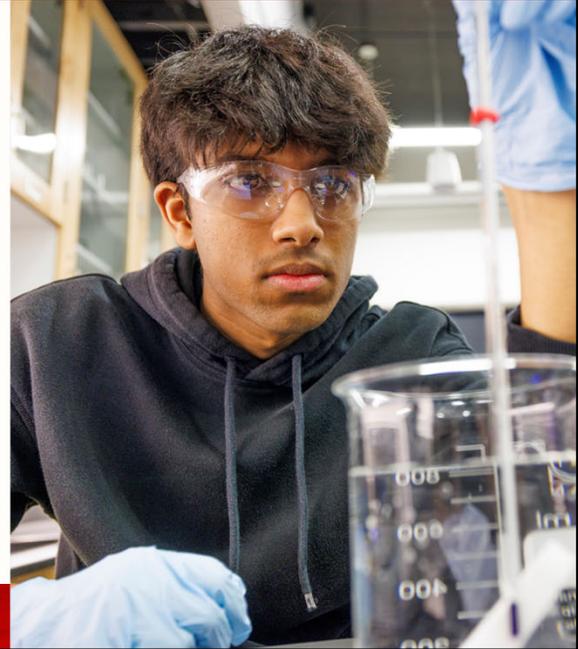
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## Micro-Affirmations

- Small language shifts.
  - Subtle language and behaviors that signal inclusion, respect, and recognition.
- Big impact to experience.



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## Creating Message Alignment

- Communication strategy
- Cross-team coordination and teamwork
- Anticipate friction and questions



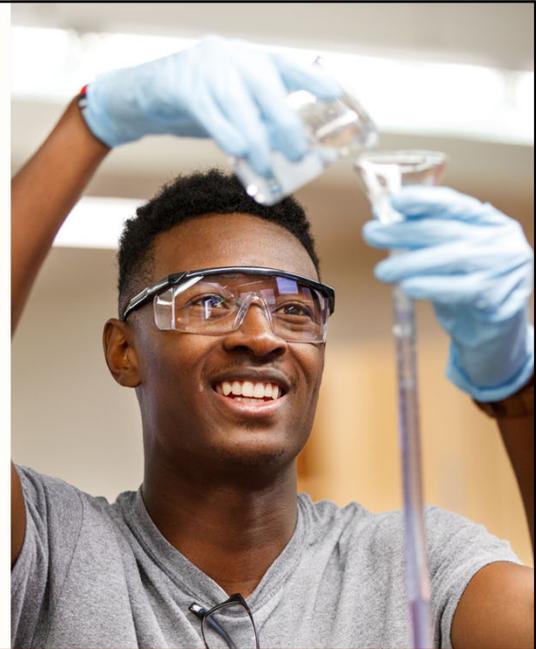
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## Handling Difficult Conversations

- Acknowledge → Clarify → Support
- Do not over-explain policy
- Stay student-centered
- Students are advised to ask for more financial support
- Avoid defensive or institutional language



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## Balancing Empathy with Accuracy

- Empathy does not mean overpromising and is not a weakness
- Clarity builds trust
- Consistency is key



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## Operationalize the Work

- Embed it into your processes and systems. Guiding framework.
- Audit your communications. Doesn't have to be all at once.
- Think of student-facing and staff-facing communications.
- Train staff intentionally and use feedback loops

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## Key Takeaways

- Affirmation drives belonging
- Validation builds trust
- Consistency enables scale
- Leadership sets the tone



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## Reflection/Discussion

- Where are your biggest gaps today?
- What message needs to change first?
- How can you align your staff and teams?