
ADULT-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP STUDY

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LEARNING GOALS

Learning Question | Understanding Barriers

Learning Question	Data Source	Data Collection Methods
<p>What are the biggest barriers, in your position, to building strong, healthy relationships with students in your school?</p>	<p>Teachers and principals</p>	<p>Slack post to generate list of themes on perceptions of system definitions of school success</p>
	<p>Caregivers</p>	<p>Pulse check to generate list of most common barriers and probe into sub-questions</p>

Learning Question | Leveraging Strong Relationships

Learning Questions	Data Source	Data Collection Methods
<p>How do you use your 1:1 relationships to help individual students overcome systemic barriers (like racism, ableism, sexism) that may make it harder for them to achieve the same goals as their peers who don't face these same challenges?</p>	<p>Teachers and principals</p>	<p>Focus group discussion to learn about practitioner solutions and perceived opportunities related to adult-student relationships</p>
<p>What do you do in your classroom or school to help students develop a shared understanding of issues of inequity and their roles/responsibilities in it?</p>		
<p>How do you promote positive peer-to-peer relationships across lines of race/ethnicity and other differences in your classroom?</p>		

Learning Question | School Culture

Learning Questions	Data Source	Data Collection Methods
<p>How does your school acknowledge and discuss problems that make it harder for some students to succeed than others, such as racism, sexism, ableism, classism, and poverty? How does your school help students who face problems like these overcome them?</p>	<p>Caregivers</p>	<p>Focus group discussion to learn about caregiver solutions and perceived opportunities related to adult-student relationships in schools/learning environments</p>



STUDY APPROACH

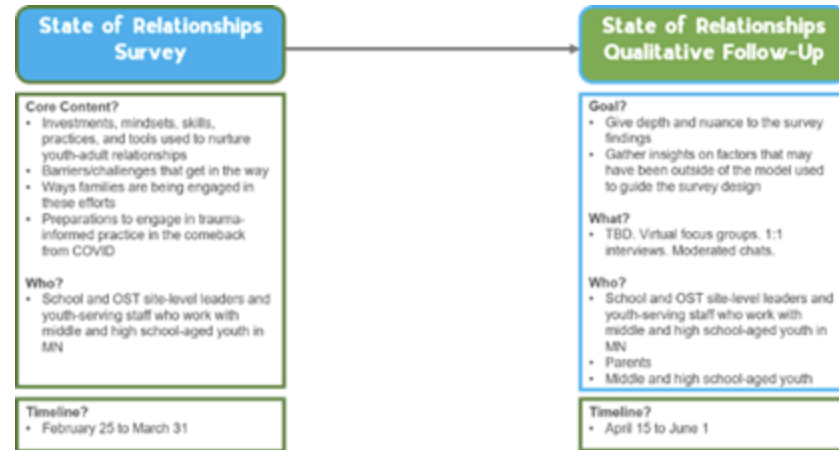
Why Focus on Adult-Student Relationships?

STUDY PURPOSE

- Probe into the **barriers to developing & opportunities presented by** strong developmental relationships (DR) between adults and students
 - Role of DR in navigating systemic barriers and advancing equity for students
- Pilot co-creation of learning questions between Gates & a research partner

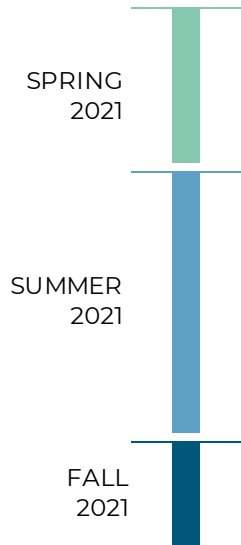
BUILDING UPON EXISTING EFFORTS

- [State of Relationships Survey: Creating Relationship-Rich Spaces for Minnesota Youth](#)
 - Survey of MN School and OST Leaders and Staff
- Roots in Relationships model - [Developmental Relationships Primer](#)
- Rooted in Relationships [Model and Process Booklet](#)



Timeline and Intermittent Deliverables

TIMELINE AND SHARED FINDINGS



- **March** - Scoping call, drafting of learning questions by partner organizations
- **April** - Planning call & learning question refinement

- **May-June** - Slack and pulse check engagement and analysis: [Analysis Memo - Slack & Pulse Check Engagements](#) ➤ ➤
- **July** - Partner organizations review of the Slack and Pulse Check Analysis Memo and focus group guides
- **Aug - Sept** - Focus group sessions and analysis: [Analysis Memo - Focus Groups](#) ➤ ➤

- **Sept** - Results validation with caregivers, teachers, and principals
- **Sept - Oct** - [Sense-making session with Search Institute and ResultsLab](#), final deliverables, [translation and activation of insights](#)

➤ Caregiver voice secured by [Possip](#)
 ➤ Teacher and Principal voice secured by [ResultsLab](#)



DESIGN, ENGAGEMENT, & HIGH-LEVEL FINDINGS

Engagement and Participant Demographics | Trend Exploration

Caregiver Pulse Check Participants by Preferred Language (n = 36)

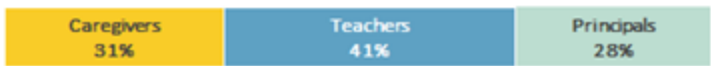


Slack Participants by Role (n = 36)

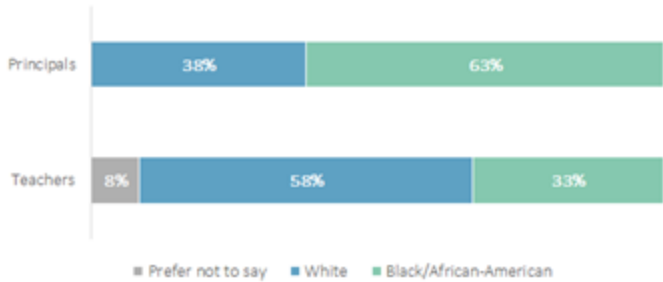


Engagement and Participant Demographics | Focus Group Discussions

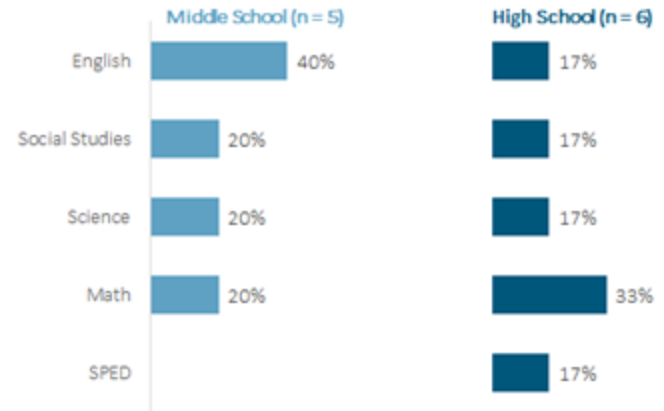
Focus Group Participants Overall (n=29)



Focus Group Participants' Racial Identity (n = 20)



Subject Taught by Teacher Focus Group Participants (n = 11)



Caregivers by Grade Band of Eldest Student (n = 12)



All 9 focus groups were conducted between August 5th and August 9th. One caregiver focus group was conducted in Spanish to ensure the experiences of English Language Learner students and their families were incorporated into the study.

Engagement and Participant Demographics | Sense-Making with Participants*

All caregiver focus group participants were invited to participate in sense-making efforts. Teacher and principal focus group participants who elected to continue panel engagement in the new 21-22 school year were invited to participate in sense-making efforts

Of the 27 caregivers, teachers, and principals invited* to participate in sense-making efforts of emerging findings, 70% chose to engage in this study segment, with engagement highest among caregivers (100%) followed by principals (63%). This indicates a high willingness of participants to continue their engagement and potential perceived value of doing so. Such is especially the case for caregivers who were especially appreciative of the opportunity to share their voices.

Sense-Making Participation Overall (n=19)



* Sense-Making Processes are the methods ResultsLab uses to validate emerging finding with study participants. This is part of efforts to make the research process participatory at multiple stages and ensure more nuanced results by involving participants in the data interpretation phase. In this case, caregivers were given a survey with open-ended questions while teachers and principals were asked to react to an early findings memo in a closed channel on Slack.

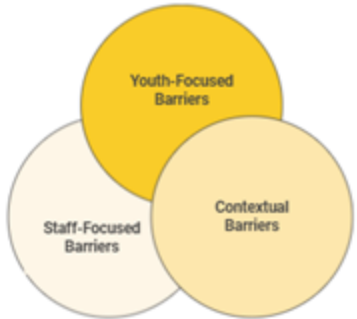
High-Level Findings | Barriers and Promising Practices with Adult-Student Relationships

Barriers to Developing & Sustaining Adult-Student Relationships

Promising Methods for Addressing Barriers to Adult-Student Relationships

Strong Leveraging Adult-Student Relationships

Needs Around Training and In-School Supports to Improve Adult-Student Relationships



- Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Centric
- Based in Continual Learning and Ongoing Feedback
- Application and Utilization Focused

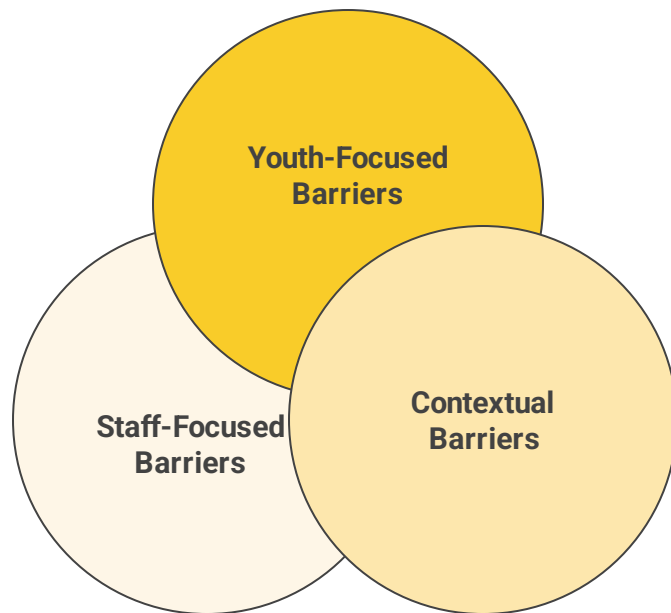


KEY FINDINGS



Barriers to Developing & Sustaining Adult-Student Relationships

The main types of barriers identified by teachers and principals were youth, staff, and context-focused. Teachers and principals discussed ways in which they had overcome many barriers, but still spoke to the need for a greater investment in solutions. Caregivers recognize that improving adult-student relationships requires a foundation of culturally-relevant curriculum that make students feel seen and willing to engage.



Youth and Staff-Focused Barriers

YOUTH-FOCUSED BARRIERS

Youth engagement & trust with staff were common barriers to developing relationships with schools. Covid-19 and virtual learning further challenged relationship building with schools.

STAFF-FOCUSED BARRIERS

For principals and teachers, a lack of time was a common barrier to developing relationships with students. Alternatively, for principals, lack of skills to respond in a culturally-responsive way, staff hesitation to share power with students, staff having different life experiences than youth were additional barriers to developing relationships with schools. For principals having a staff that did not reflect the youth they work with challenged relationship development with schools.

"I have been successful to some extent in overcoming the barrier of youth engagement or in other words to keep my students engaged during instructional time. To make it happen everyday I have allotted a small chunk of time for SEL and community building activities. (such as---asking about their feelings, highs and low of the days, collaboration time with peers etc. Also I have incorporated some online games, quizzes, quick check, think and share, reflection time(mainly to make my lessons more enjoyable and interesting). These motivate my students to remain focused and engaged." - Teacher Panelist

"I like to tell students about my childhood experiences and help them reflect more about their actions. I also tell them about the importance of talking to a trusted adult or journaling about how they are feeling so they learn how to cope with stress and/or traumatic situations. The results have been successful because students have vented to me about personal issues like their gender identity, homelessness, parental addiction, and mental health." - Teacher Panelist

Contextual Barriers

EDUCATOR PERSPECTIVE

For teachers and principals, a lack of parent and family engagement and lack of time specifically dedicated to building relationships with youth were cited as barriers to building relationships with students. For principals, working within an external system that is structurally racist was an additional barrier to developing relationships.

When the topic of Critical Race Theory and ongoing debates on a national stage arose, principals voiced concerns over how state legislation would affect their ability to train staff on topic of equity and systemic racism, thereby improving acceptance and allowing meaningful relationships to develop. The impact of local context stretches beyond classroom teaching to the need for professional development alongside pushback from the broader community.

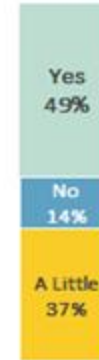
“As we as a country talk about critical race theory and what that looks like in North Carolina specifically, they have some language that would make it not allowed. And so they’ve even talked about the repercussion is removing a school’s funding for using a variety of words ... like systemic oppression, slavery as an economic driver. How would you literally teach the founding of America without saying certain words? We lose the ability to say things and we have to get more creative in how we’re delivering content and professional development.” - Principal Panelist

Contextual Barriers

CAREGIVER PERSPECTIVE

Effective communication was seen as essential for helping caregivers stay informed with of their child's academic progress, understand staff roles and responsibilities, and get to know the teachers. Through their own strong relationships with the school, caregivers felt students were better able to form strong relationships with adults in the school, thereby having student needs better met. When asked, "What gets in the way of you building strong relationships with teachers and other staff at your child's school?", caregivers found it challenging when schools **did not communicate effectively**.

Do You Have A Strong Relationship With Teachers, Staff, or Parents At Your Child's School? (n=35)



"We were a new family to [name of school]. And I honestly felt like an alien landing in another planet without knowing the language or the culture. It was enormously difficult to navigate [name of school]. It is very difficult to find information on the website. The information sent out does not provide clear steps and often times makes assumptions that we are already familiar with certain terms or procedures. And when I have called the school, the staff has often time seemed irritated that I have a question. Better communication is desperately needed. And it is needed in a clear format with, at times, step by step instructions." - Caregiver Panelist

Contextual Barriers

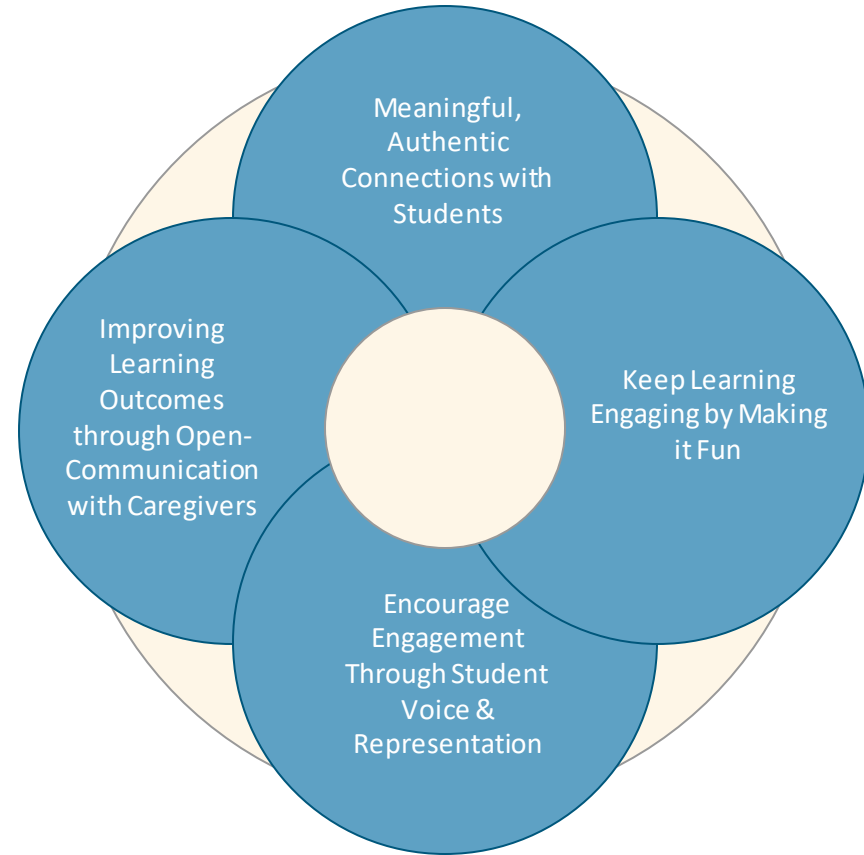
CAREGIVER PERSPECTIVE CONT.

Other barriers to building strong relationships with teachers and staff included:

- **Time constraints.** For example, caregivers might not have the time or ability to go to the school in -person.
- **Language barriers.** Some caregivers requested that schools have an interpreter to translate school meetings or other information communicated by the school.
- **Perceived lack of care for their child.** Perceptions among caregivers that teachers/staff do not prioritize their child or their needs.
- **Covid-19.** Caregivers couldn't visit school/classroom in person or participate in school/classroom activities which made it difficult to build relationships in AY 20-21.
- **Attitude(s), behaviors, and systems.** Ineffective but inflexible school systems that make it difficult for caregivers to connect with staff, with little apparent will to improve those systems.



Promising Methods for Addressing Barriers to Adult-Student Relationships



Meaningful, Authentic Connections with Students and Families

WHY

Intention around forming positive student relationships created a positive feedback loop where teachers are able to examine their assumptions and behaviors and develop their own self-awareness around what they were and weren't doing to develop trust with student relationships. Here, teachers valued strong interpersonal relationships born out of mutual earned respect and trust.

This differs from now-outdated hierarchical views that adults should automatically be trusted and conferred this respect, and students should simply listen and follow direction. While adults in schools do have power over students and the relationship is not egalitarian, panelists reported much better relationships with students when they themselves had a willingness to be vulnerable, empathetic, self-aware and self-reflective to students' perspectives.

"I find that just making students feel heard and giving them the space to share what they need to share is really helpful. I never give prompts for students to share anything personal. But there's always the option of you can write about what I'm asking or you can write about anything that you need to share. So I found that some of my students who really feel like they need adult attention and care will use that space to get what they're seeking." - Teacher Panelist

"My colleagues and I formed a social justice task force to address systemic racism at our school. And some of my students started coming and it was fascinating to see how their perspective of me and their other teachers entirely shifted when they saw that we were engaged in doing this work on our own time, that students who had been very quiet or kind of reluctant to participate once they saw that we were dedicated and committed to challenging structures that didn't support students, they felt a lot more, I think, open to being vulnerable to connecting and trying things when they felt like our interests were aligned with theirs." - Teacher

Meaningful, Authentic Connections with Students and Families

HOW

Panelists worked to understand and develop their own self-awareness and capacity to form trusted student relationships; they reported externally-supported and -facilitated processes as being a big help in this. Then, they worked to treat students in ways that helped them feel seen and valued, such as: Setting aside time during the day to talk to their students, Making notes after a student shared something personal or of interest to them, Daily check ins (e.g., asking about feelings), Decorating their classroom with meaningful pictures, and Selecting culturally relevant curriculum

“Through our approach to presenting the school year (heavy on messaging, heavy social media presence, advisory/SEL period focus) we were able to “sell” our product and create a more caring and concerned culture in which to attract students and families” -Principal Panelist

“I like to tell students about my childhood experiences and help them reflect more about their actions. I also tell them about the importance of talking to a trusted adult or journaling about how they are feeling so they learn how to cope with stress and/or traumatic situations. The results have been successful because students have vented to me about personal issues like their gender identity, homelessness, parental addiction, and mental health.” -Teacher Panelist

Keep Learning Engaging by Making it Fun and Inclusive

WHY

Teacher and principal panelists expressed value in getting to know students inside and outside of the classroom in order to connect through fun activities and shared interests. This commitment and connection demonstrated the adults' investment in a way that was tangible to students and also equipped students with useful resources and outlets. These ranged from recommending books with characters and stories that resonated with lonely or isolated students to sponsoring a social justice task force.

Caregivers appreciated teachers and curriculum that foster agency by enabling students to choose specific content, particularly in the space of reading. In discussions, caregivers lit up with enthusiasm when they could share when their students were able -- and encouraged -- to seek out research projects and resources that resonated with them personally, rather than having to adhere to curricular choices that were less personally relevant. With these choices available, they saw their students much more engaged in thinking and learning, and it tangibly embodied values of inclusivity and diversity.

"It's important for us as administrators to make sure that we get to know our students outside of our office. So one of the things that I like to do is when I'm in classrooms outside of times when I'm doing formal observations, if kids are working in groups, I like to sit in groups. If they're playing a game or they're on a team, I'll join a team. I do like to sit with kids in the cafeteria and have lunch with different kids. It just gives me an opportunity to know them a little bit better. So then they will open up to you and you can identify sometimes when they're a bit more uncomfortable and then you can address those things a little bit more easily." - Principal

"To get to know my students on a personal level and find the commonalities that I have with my students, we did a question of the day. I was teaching virtual, so it's hard to get to know them like I would in person. But we start with a basic question of the day, like, what's your favorite teacher, or who has the best fries... something like that to make that personal connection with them. And I would spend my time getting to know them at the beginning of class instead of jumping right into teaching. And I was able to, with that, listen more toward their interests." - Teacher

Keep Learning Engaging by Making it Fun and Inclusive

HOW

Teachers spoke to curriculum and specific group activities that they employ, particularly around bridging race/ethnicity boundaries as these seemed most apparent in the student body and also the most challenging for students to address on their own. Teachers also emphasized classroom-level engagement, culturally appropriate, relevant, engaging curriculum and literature, and daily engagement practices as essential for building clear social contracts with students. Cultivating empathy in no way diminished their ability to set and maintain high social and academic expectations.

Getting students who don't normally cross paths to interact was only part of this intentional effort to build peer relationships and community; another key part was helping these students actively discover things that they had in common. Classroom activities and representative resources helped students feel seen and cared about, and therefore more open to forming relationships. Some methods included: Online games, Reflection time, Think and share, and Guided YA literature programs

"Eating lunch with them definitely kind of lowers that wall, that defense that they may have up, and along the same lines, extracurricular activities. I don't like going outside or bugs, but I will definitely go to their sporting activities, things like that. We had a band camp this whole week, which was fun for the kids and they were doing relays, so I played with them. They are able to see you as a not just as the figurehead, as the principal, but as a real person who's willing to, you know, not be on their level, but to play with you, hang out with you, get to know you and your interests." - Principal

"I have allotted a small chunk of time for SEL and community building activities. (such as—asking about their feelings, highs and low of the days, collaboration time with peers etc. Also I have incorporated some online games, quizzes, quick check, think and share, reflection time (mainly to make my lessons more enjoyable and interesting). These motivate my students to remain focused and engaged." -Teacher Panelist

Encourage Engagement Through Student Voice & Representation

WHY

According to teachers and principals, inviting student voice and representation forms the third leg of actively developing and sustaining meaningful adult-student relationships. It supports the two adult-driven elements previously discussed and places importance and weight to students' perspectives and opinions around their identities and interests. This also enables space for students to articulate and advocate for their social-emotional and learning needs and use agency to make meaningful choices that direct their learning or co-create new opportunities to think, explore, and test ideas.

As proponents of student-agency, caregivers did not think that teachers or principals should try to figure out student needs and interests alone and in a vacuum. Here individuals suggested more efforts to ask students what's relevant and interesting to them in order to get their input and validation in planning.

"You find those common areas and I point them out and I say, 'Hey, this will be great for you to do because you said you were interested in XYZ. And so maybe this would be something you'd be interested in doing. And hey, so-and-so said they were interested in this as well.' So really part of breaking down these barriers is getting them to find the commonalities. So having that with them, having them find that in their community, not only in our classroom community but outside as well. We've had guest speakers before. And so instead of what draws us apart, what brings us together, and let's focus on that, even though we know that there are things that separate us, what can we do to bring ourselves together and help each other get to our goals? So I have a big sense of building community, but in order to do that, I have to have one or two relationships with my students and help them build relationships with their classmates." – Teacher

Panelist

Encourage Engagement Through Student Voice & Representation

HOW

Panelists shared using a combination of student voice and representation in the physical school environment and in actions/interactions with others. This created a wholeness and consistency that supported and encouraged students to share and participate and adults to value those contributions. By sharing personal stories about their life with students, decorating their classroom with meaningful pictures, and asking students questions and asking for their input, teachers and principals shared experiences of ways they have increased student engagement.

Similarly, to incorporate student voice, caregivers suggested a variety of ways to gather student voice, including direct conversations, student panels, and student surveys. They also suggested pulling in other resources such as caregivers, equity teams or BIPOC colleagues, and even news stories/events.

“One thing on my campus is we have a student government and representatives from each grade level... they really enjoy having a voice. They really enjoy being able to advocate for their peers. ‘You want to do anti-bullying activities in October? OK, what do you want to do? Let’s look it up.’ And so they know that on my campus that they want to do something, they got to put it together. And it’s more impactful when it’s student led as opposed to me telling y’all we’re going to do.” –Principal Panelist

Improving Learning Outcomes through Nurtured Relationships with Caregivers and Families

WHY

Caregivers feel they are the experts of their student's character, strengths, and gaps. Here, they feel educators could practice open-communication to build relationships with students and better meet their needs. Caregivers wanted to see a true partnership relationship between schools and families in supporting students, with both schools and families contributing as fully as possible to a student's best interest. Open, accessible communication and collaborative strategizing are key to achieving this partnership.

In prior relationships, caregivers expressed discouragement that getting teachers and schools to follow through with communication and supports can be a full-time job, and the pandemic has generally made this even more challenging as more supports were needed and most interaction was virtual. This creates a situation where students needing more support may more easily be left behind. Regarding equity matters, caregivers also pointed out that they may have special needs (e.g. vision problems) that affects their ability to support a student, particularly in a virtual environment. A whole-family approach to school culture should be considered to ensure students can have the best possible, and most equitable, learning and support opportunities.

"I have two boys with special needs. It has been a full time job for me, managing the individual educational needs ... When you are looking at a range of different levels of needs academically, emotionally, socially, and then you reach your capacity... I don't believe that everything relies on the school, I think it's a partnership, and so I have worked really hard to advocate for my kids and their particular needs. But it's hard." - Caregiver

"Some of the staff I have talked to just seem overwhelmed and as if they just don't even care. It feels like calling a huge government office when calling to ask a question ... There needs to be leadership that will organize, structure and create a welcoming, knowledgeable, helpful culture of people who really want to be there." - Caregiver Panelist

Improving Learning Outcomes through Nurtured Relationships with Caregivers and Families

HOW

To increase parent/family engagement, teachers/staff focused on creating and maintaining connection with caregivers. Teachers/staff used the following strategies: Sending positive message to caregivers, Sharing items won through grants with students and caregivers and holding a parent/family night to talk about the items, Holding family work days/nights to explain curricula, State testing, etc in family's language, Invite students to participate in contests/school events, which increases student, and Family engagement by bringing students and families together multiple times

To improve parent/family engagement principals focused on staying connected to families by: Regularly meeting with parents over Google Meets or Zoom, Visiting communities and talking to families about their school/services, Inviting families to visit their school, Encouraging families to contact the school if they need help, and Sharing resources about what the school could provide for their child

Caregivers appreciated consistent communication from schools and appreciated diverse outreach methods including: Phone calls, Zoom check-in, In-person or virtual conferences/meetings, Chats in the hallway, Text messages, and Online communication apps (Possip and ClasTag).

"They make themselves super available and call back or email back due to our funny schedules that's excellent at this day and time for the teachers to have and to be accessible that way." -Caregiver

"Some teachers reach out in the first couple of weeks to share a strength of my child (that was amazing!). Others really are present during parent teacher conference and it's clear that they know my son(s) as individuals. They communicate their enthusiasm and share full class moments, which then gets me to write messages of gratitude, etc." - Caregiver

Barriers to Developing & Sustaining Adult-Student Relationships

Promising Methods for Addressing Barriers to Adult-Student Relationships

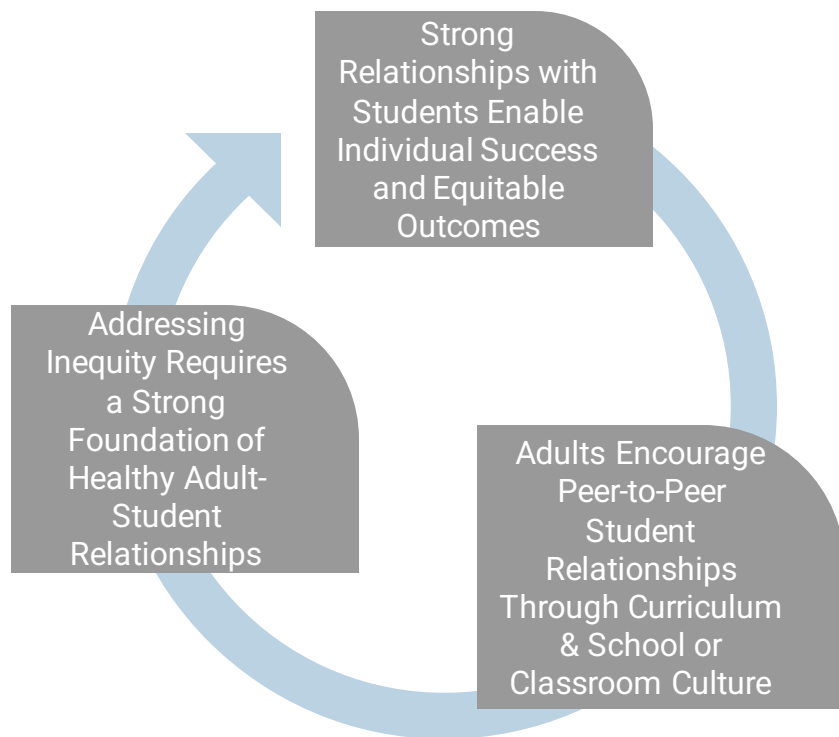
Strong Leveraging Adult-Student Relationships

Needs Around Training and In-School Supports to Improve Adult-Student Relationships



Leveraging Strong Adult-Student Relationships

Teachers and principals universally spoke to the power of strong, well-functioning relationships with students in helping to advance student outcomes. Caregivers see immense value in teachers who encourage students to choose with which content they want to engage.



Addressing Inequity Requires a Strong Foundation of Healthy Adult-Student Relationships and Thriving Students

TEACHER PERSPECTIVES

Teachers report co-creating awareness and solutions with students where neither party is expected to be fully responsible for creating an equitable environment, and both parties are expected to cultivate responsibility. This is supported by creating a shared and relevant understanding of inequity with a common vocabulary, extending invitations to participate in this work, and using interaction, conversation, and behavior-modeling.

Trusted resources were particularly helpful around this sensitive work to help it be done “right” and also to help it getting done at all (i.e. virtually no one working in a school has time to custom-develop a rationale, approach, and how-to guide to understand and address bias, racism, and equity, even though addressing these is reported to directly affect students’ learning and mental health).

“I make it very clear from day one that this is our classroom... nobody is better than anybody else... we respect everybody. You might not agree with who they are, what they look like or their preference, but your preferences are not better than their preferences. So that way everybody can have a space so that the kids can start to see ‘OK, like there are people that don't look like me, that support me.’ And so then they're able to kind of connect with each other so they can kind of start having community of themselves.” - Teacher Panelist

Addressing Inequity Requires a Strong Foundation of Healthy Adult-Student Relationships and Thriving Students

PRINCIPAL PERSPECTIVES

On a systems-level, principals reflected on the need to create a school culture where individual students felt a sense of belonging. Principals focused on the school culture and efforts to promote dialogue and acceptance and elevating student voice. Principals also report the importance of examining school policies and structures with an equity lens.

Successful efforts took several forms: modifying school structures (e.g. cohort-based counsel or relationships) to support deeper, longer-term adult-student relationships; an active adult non-disciplinary presence (e.g. in the cafeteria or at extracurriculars) where adults and students could get to know each other on a personal level; and inviting connection through access (e.g. sharing personal cell numbers and extending authentic invitations to reach out with any questions or concerns).

"I used to be real into dress code because this school sits on kind of some rival gang territories. But what happened was I said good morning to certain kids and 'take your coat off, take your hat off' to others. And so I started to kind of keep track of who I was talking with. And I noticed kids that look like me got the good morning. So they got to meet their new principal and kids that didn't culturally, I got to say, 'please be more white' because it was like, 'take your ear buds off, take your coat off, take your hat off.' ... What I found was we had inadvertently created this policy where we were specifically targeting dress code only on people of color. And so we decided to do a social experiment where the only dress code was, 'please wear pants.' We can't see your stomach, we can't see private areas. And for teachers, we did the same thing. It was just amazing because kids were actually able to come as they were. And so when we started having these conversations in small groups with admin, with teachers and students and sharing the work of the 'why', all of these other issues started popping up that I didn't know." - Principal Panelist

Strong Relationships with Students Enable Individual Success and Equitable Outcomes

According to teachers and principals, forming relationships with students is central to being able to adequately support students around both individual growth and intentional equity and social responsibility development. There is also a need to reach widespread belief/consensus in the power and importance of adult-student relationships to support learning, health, and equity and seek commitment to initiate and nurture them. Use a shared description of the characteristics of these relationships, and survey students to validate the presence of these characteristics.

This was best achieved through a combination of formal and informal student interactions to show students that they were cared about in the classroom learning environment but also being seen and valued in their general lives, as individuals with unique backgrounds, interests, struggles, and talents.

"My number one priority, which is why I'm able to, I think, have those conversations even when I host Socratic seminars. It is amazing to touch on a lot of controversial topics. There's so much respect between the students and so many burning questions that they have."
- Teacher Panelist

"The previous school that I was at, we took buses and we went through the neighborhoods with the teachers. [we] were able to see like, 'this is where our kids come from.' ... But you're also able to kind of see a glimpse into where they live, their home. So you have an idea of these is where my kids are coming from and that parents are sending their best. So we have to do our best to make sure we give those kids the tools that they need ... [It] gives you that time to really want to push and help these kids." - Principal Panelist

"Currently relationships are paramount. As we have moved more towards a digitized classroom and world, we must realize that the digital world can either strengthen or weaken relationships based on how we pursue them and cultivate them." - Teacher Panelist

Improving Adult-Student Relationships Through School and Classroom Culture

PRINCIPAL AND TEACHER PERSPECTIVES

Principals and teachers made references to overarching school culture in contexts that emphasize the importance of a welcoming culture in building strong relationships and successful students. By creating positive, inclusive, schoolwide norms, groups felt peer-to-peer relationships could improve, understanding could increase, and learning outcomes could improve.

Cited methods for building acceptance that were implemented at the school and classroom level but were always facilitated by an adult who cared to form stronger relationships with students. Intentional techniques to facilitate peer-to-peer relationships and community included creating a school and classroom culture grounded in an appreciation for diversity as well as student agency and peer-to-peer allyship.

"I say, 'You've got to pay attention because we want you to not only just hang with your peers, we want you to get to know each other... Try to learn about your peers across the isle.' They know I don't like to see them by themselves." - Principal Panelist

"This year I have a lot of proudly open LGBTQ students and it creates some animosity with students who don't agree with their choices. Gender identity should be added to race/ethnicity as topics students must learn to respectfully discuss and respectfully disagree." - Teacher Panelist

"We have worked over the last four years to build an Equity Team in order to support an anti-racist school. The team is comprised of staff, teachers and parents and we work to combat systemic racism through restorative circles, student voice sessions and curricular change frameworks. We have more work to do, but our ET is growing and evolving each year." -Principal Panelist

Improving Adult-Student Relationships Through School and Classroom Culture

CAREGIVER PERSPECTIVES

In the context of equity and students both having what they need to learn and feeling a sense of belonging in the classroom and school, the concept of bullying came up often. Here, parents spoke about the need to set good examples by encouraging their children to defend their peers and be good people, as well as teaching lessons about diversity and the historical context behind what they may be feeling or experiencing.

Caregivers also expected schools set and enforce these expectations as well as students learn and practice self and peer-to-peer advocacy. By teaching kindness and inclusion, caregivers believe that teachers can not only improve their relationships with students but also have a positive effect on creating a school culture where students feel accepted and want to learn. Caregivers noted that they were trying to build their student's capacity for self-advocacy and actively supporting equity (e.g. helping a bullied student stand up for themselves).

"I've seen the bullying experience that she had in elementary [being bullied] translate to how she has shown up in middle school and high school is that she is definitely more empathetic, particularly with her peers that are identifying as in different ways with their gender identity and sexual orientation. So she's more willing to learn and advocate for her peers in that space..." - Caregiver

"I try to speak with other moms and we get together as parents and speak with the kids. Tell our kids to not engage in any bullying at school toward their other classmates. But there are moms that get upset, right? They say: "Well, they are kids. What can we do?" ... So, sometimes that upsets me because she always has that excuse, right? Of saying "oh your kid also bothers him." - Caregiver



Needs Around Training and In-School Supports to Improve Adult-Student Relationships

Several caregivers spoke about how they'd like to see school leadership and teachers engage in more professional development that helps them acknowledge their own biases and facilitate a more accepting school environment. Teachers and principals were enthusiastic about the prospect of professional development and ongoing training opportunities that could ultimately lead to stronger adult student relationships with their students/students in their schools. Teachers in particular, but principles as well, made reference to the need for greater implicit bias and DEIJ training opportunities for teachers and staff.

Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion
Centric

Based in Continual Learning and
Ongoing Feedback

Application and Utilization Focused

Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Centric Training

TEACHER AND PRINCIPAL PERSPECTIVES

Teachers enthusiastically supported access to quality professional development around DEIJ skills and saw training around implicit bias as necessary for building skills and comfort in interacting with their students. Here, teachers expressed motivation and interest in learning how to better build student relationships, fight inequity, and help their colleagues and students break down individual and systemic barriers to success.

Similarly, principals expressed interest in effective and meaningful professional development to truly support teachers' ongoing DEIJ awareness and practice. Generally, these groups acknowledged the importance of critical reflection in this journey as well as a need for having subject-matter facilitators with classroom experience delivering content as well.

"This summer, I had this class [with] more boys than girls. I said, 'Oh, my God, I'm going to have nine boys and four girls. Oh, there's boys. They're going to be all over the place.' And I thought, 'You already think in your mind, unconscious bias.'" - Teacher Panelist

"We have to do implicit bias training throughout the whole year. It was every other Wednesday in lieu of our school-wide meetings, and we always had some type of a central question we had to approach. We always had a discussion question that we had to discuss, and there was a quiz that we had to take about it.. It was interesting to see what I thought I believed and then what this one piece of data is showing. And it made me self-reflect." - Teacher Panelist

Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Centric Training

CAREGIVER PERSPECTIVES

When asked about pathways towards improved adult-student relationships in the school setting caregivers spoke about how they'd like to see school leadership and teachers engage in more professional development that helps them acknowledge their own biases and facilitate a more accepting school environment.

Spanish-speaking caregivers in particular noted the importance of engaging with their own support networks (e.g. Possip; other Spanish-speaking parents) when trying to have their voices and the needs of their students heard. Professional development may be able to help principals and teachers understand not only the importance of affording caregivers opportunities to be seen and heard but also tools and strategies to do this effectively.

"I think it takes a certain mindfulness when we're talking about teaching from a lens of equity. It means being able to acknowledge blind spots and things that you may never really consider, like having positive representations of all types of people throughout the school, whether that's in literature or just images that we might use on a website. Because part of it, you know, whenever we're talking about building a school community, there's a need to feel connected and it's difficult to feel connected if you don't feel seen." - Caregiver Panelist

Gap Awareness

"Offer to bring in outside resources and subject matter experts on inclusivity; discuss the difference between inclusiveness and an passivity-for example when does someone else's freedom of expression need to be addressed because it is disruptive or makes someone else feel unsafe?" - Caregiver

Professional Development

Professional Development Should Be Grounded in Continual Learning and Ongoing Feedback

TEACHERS PERSPECTIVES

When asked what training and supports might improve relationships with students, teachers expressed interest in better understanding where their students were coming from and building skills in cultural competence. They recognized, however, that building trust with their students and the ultimate ability to improve learning outcomes as a result is something that takes ongoing work on their part.

While trainings through webinars were perceived as useful, many teachers expressed that soft-skills in relationship management require practice, feedback, and a group setting in which you can continue to build on skills. Here, teachers voiced a particular interest in small group or cohort style DEIJ learning opportunities that are ongoing in addition to having workshops and handouts so they can build and refine skills while receiving encouragement and support.

"I am thinking of a cohort. Like you take classes and are the same [people] all the time. You can break things into smaller pieces that really need help understanding, like how do you do this, why it's important... I love workshops, but if you're new to a topic or something, you can get overwhelmed because it's a lot of information at one time. I think having that time to dive deep in small pieces to be able to dive into things that they're unfamiliar, it might have a bigger impact than doing it all at once." - Teacher Panelist

Professional Development Should Be Grounded in Continual Learning and Ongoing Feedback

PRINCIPAL PERSPECTIVES

With all training aimed at improving teacher relationships with students, principals were most interested in making sure the training was sound and effective but that there are feedback mechanisms and continued learning/leadership in place to course-correct and build. They recognized that there were relationship and trust building actions that were more accessible and easy such as hanging posters of racially-diverse professionals in classrooms. However, they were more interested in deeper development for all teachers in their school.

Principals saw the role of an instructional coach as essential. Here, this person may be an expert in content, but can also offer guidance on how to be approachable and make classroom engagement inclusive. Many also saw power here in not just sharing data on a school and classroom level, but also in offering coaching on how to implement data-driven strategies

“Workshops would be great. But also that becomes OK, how do you leave that and who does it and do they have that correct? The training behind those becomes a big deal. But I also know that if they're too large, they don't make what we need. And to have good, good leaders for those becomes really difficult.” - Principal

Educators Want Application and Utilization Focused Training

TEACHER AND PRINCIPAL PERSPECTIVES

When asked what sort of professional development for improving adult-student relationships, teachers placed high importance on application. Here, many cited examples of professional development that had been useful in the past due to clear and immediate applicability. This paired with an ability to practice with peers or support in adapting content for their own classrooms were useful for internalizing and applying learning and brainstorm next steps.

Ultimately, this perceived sense of usefulness supported their motivation for learning and doing more to engage their own students. Principals echoed the importance of applicability but also intentionality of welcoming sentiments into all elements of the classroom including curriculum and environment.

"I have been in the district for twentyseven years. However, we have lots of new teachers and our student population in most of the schools is minority, Latino and African-American. But [but the new teachers] shy away from having these conversations because their perception is that the focus should be on instruction. And what I try to impress upon them is that in order to provide students with quality instruction that's relevant.. Having conversations, giving students an opportunity to express things that are going on with them socially. If students don't feel like they're valued in the classroom, you're not going to be able to reach them instructionally." - Teacher Panelist

"As we look for more equitable processes, I think those things could easily translate into helping teachers in real time have some professional development so that they're leading kids to a more welcoming environment. So it's not just like there is a black mathematician on the wall, but that we're actually saying and affirming things that invite all kids to participate in our education." - Principal



REFLECTIVE PRACTICE & NEXT STEPS

Reflective Practice - Opportunities and Areas of Further Inquiry

- Misalignment between staff & leadership AND between teachers and students; Consistent with misalignment observed in SI's research with schools saying there is lack of engagement and parents saying there is lack of communication → **What is the source of misalignment and how can it be addressed?**
- Next big area of exploration → **How are students or caregivers experiencing teacher & principal efforts at fostering inclusion?**
- **Reflecting on the themes of creating a safe space, engaging in critical reflection, educating Ts/Ps** → **How can school partners help to deliver these trainings and supports?**
 - The cohort PD model resonated with these practitioners, which provides additional validation for SI's approach to scaffolding their supports; Providing materials to Ts/Ps to continue working together in small group settings
- The trends with barriers reinforced the need for supporting structures to build strong DRs - Consistent with SI's work ([see deck](#))
- This study reinforces the notions that relational climates and supporting structures matter ([see, SI's Social Capital work](#)); They make it possible for students to have psychological safety and explore and express their personal identities
- *Missing - Bridging gaps; there's an opportunity for more here*

Resource Translation and Activation

TRANSLATION PROCESS

ResultsLab will work with Search Institute to translate the study results into a final asset(s) that are optimized for sharing back with stakeholders. The goal is that the final assets are as useful and usable as possible for practitioner audiences.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTIVATION

Utilization of the translated research depends on the intended audience and anticipated goals from a wider audience having access to this research once translated into a digestible and engaging format. To achieve maximum activation, ResultsLab will help Search Institute to consider stakeholders that may be interested in the findings, and consider mechanisms for reaching those groups.

REOPENING SCHOOLS: EDUCATOR INSIGHTS

This report summarizes teacher and school leader sentiments about the reopening of schools after early closures due to COVID-19. It provides examples of how schools and districts have addressed concerns and prepared for safety and instruction in Fall 2020. [Access the full report here.](#)

Findings are a result of written thoughts and facilitated group discussions with educators, which were intended to provide them a space to connect and reflect, and to surface potential concerns and resources. This study was conducted via virtual educator panels, as part of the Teacher/Teacher and Educator/Project communities, supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

EDUCATOR CONCERNS FOR REOPENING SCHOOLS

- Teachers and school leaders expressed feelings of uncertainty, skepticism, worry, fear, and distrust about the **personal health and safety** of educators, their families, and students.
- Teachers and school leaders discussed fears of a **widening equity gap** in the fall, pointing to disparities in access to technology, availability of parental support.
- Teachers and school leaders shared concerns about **students' social-emotional needs**, noting that experiences of trauma will be widespread in the coming year and relationship building could become strained in virtual environments.
- School leaders and teachers expressed **reduced levels of preparedness for instruction**.

PANELIST EXAMPLES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR ADDRESSING CONCERNS

HEALTH AND SAFETY SUPPORTS

- Establish and communicate protocols:** Provide ample opportunity for educators to contribute to or provide feedback on school and district plans.
- Deploy teacher preparation:** Delayed starts offered educators more time to participate in critical training for both instruction and public health protocols.
- Clarify and simplify:** Detailed protocols and training on safety protocols, including clearly defined roles and responsibilities.
- Advocate public resources:** Distribute hand sanitizer, masks, face shields.
- Practice:** Classroom mockups to prepare teachers for proper spacing.

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL SUPPORTS

- Build intentional time for connection and social-emotional development.
- Provide fun and interactive ways for students to reflect and connect.
- Provide social-emotional outreach to students.
- Conduct dedicated SEL needs assessments with families.

INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORTS

- Delay start dates to allow for additional planning time.
- Make investments in technology and software for teachers and families.
- Increase training time to allow for focus on online and in-person training.
- Provide in-service training virtually to model what it will look like virtually.

August 18, 2020

LIVE BUILD ESSENTIALS
A Live Build Event is a process for weaving high-quality research and actionable resources for practitioners. The goal is to help close the gap between K-12 research and practice.

PARTNER
The partner organization leads the process, sets goals, and identifies a target audience of teachers, students, and school leaders.

IDEAL TRAITS
Partnership and content are key. The process is collaborative and iterative.

CONTENT PRODUCER
A group of practitioners, including those from the partner organization, work together to create content.

TEAM
The Live Build team includes the partner and design the final product. They are a small, cross-sector group with diverse experience and a passion for finding practical solutions to real-world problems.

FACILITATOR
A representative of the partner organization, the facilitator leads the process, builds relationships, and ensures the process is collaborative and iterative.

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LIVE BUILD EVENT
The Live Build event includes a brief, facilitated multi-day online and design of a final product that closes the gap between research and practice.

Best practices for a Live Build Event:

- Use the Research Distribution Toolkit to guide the Live Build process.
- Investigate and plan for equity, accessibility, and digital literacy.
- Assign roles and responsibilities, including agenda setting or content lead in advance.
- Build an inclusive process, including a feedback loop, but ensure you have enough time to allow for deep conversations.

Translated Research Example: Infographic

Translated Research Example: One-Page Summary Memo