

## Supportive Student-Educator Relationships

### WHAT ARE THEY AND WHY DO THEY MATTER?

*Strong, supportive developmental relationships with adults are often the single most important factor for a student's development.* These relationships make it easier for students to seek out academic and social-emotional help and to feel celebrated for their accomplishments inside and outside of school. According to research from the *Search Institute*, “Middle school students who reported high levels of developmental relationships with their teachers were eight times more likely to stick with challenging tasks, enjoy working hard, and know it is okay to make mistakes when learning, when compared with low levels of educator-student relationships.”<sup>1</sup>

Building authentic relationships eases students' adjustment to school and is especially important as students move toward adolescence and gain more autonomy. Strong student-educator relationships are predictive of a variety of positive outcomes like increased attendance and more academic resilience. However, the benefits of these relationships for students go far beyond the classroom. More substantive mentor relationships with students also allow you to empower and support your students to pursue new opportunities, develop strategies for dealing with personal issues, and assist them in thinking about their long-term goals.

### HOW DO WE DEVELOP EDUCATOR-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS WITH AN EQUITY LENS?

The [Relationships First](#) guide, developed by the *Search Institute* identifies [five elements](#) “that make relationships powerful in young people's lives” - expressing care, challenging growth, providing support, sharing power, and expanding possibilities.<sup>2</sup> They also offer 55 direct actions that adults can take to strength one on one relationships. In a similar vein, the CPS Equity Framework, asks educators to “lift up and institutionalize culturally relevant

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and sustaining opportunities that celebrate students' identities and offer positive developmental experiences" through liberatory thinking and "prioritizing the voices of those with the most critical needs by providing accessible engagement points" through inclusive partnerships.<sup>7</sup> Together, these two frameworks offer a powerful case and starting point for building intentional relationships and curriculum with the student's full identity at the center.

#### SECONDARY DRIVER | GATHERING ACTIONABLE DATA

Actionable data is essential and sometimes difficult to come by when it comes to measuring complexities like social emotional learning competencies, sense of belonging and educator-student relationships. The tools below aim to help with both collecting that data and organizing it in a way that makes it actionable for staff.

- [Kelvin](#) | Kelvin is a tool that sends out customizable "pulses", or short questionnaires, that are sent regularly to students, staff, and families, in order to quickly identify challenges, offer students the opportunity to connect with adults, and understand SEL school-wide through data aggregation.
- Getting to Know You Questionnaire | This questionnaire helps educators gather information to help create a better learning experience for students and quickly learn information that can aid in building strong relationships based on student interests. (link to be added soon)
- Student Experience Survey | This survey helps to gain new insight into how students are experiencing school and give schools feedback that can be used to change a policy and monitor changes over time. (link to be added soon)
- Pulse Check In | A pulse check-in is meant to gather quick feedback from students throughout the schoolyear on how they are doing and how they are feeling about school. Generally, it should be no more than five questions, and the answers should be actionable at the student and school-levels. (link to be added soon)

### SECONDARY DRIVER | INCORPORATING STUDENT INTERESTS

Incorporating your students' interests into your lesson plans can be a great way to improve your relationships with students and make students more engaged in their learning. This section will provide resources on how to utilize students' interests and tools to help with successful implementation.

- [Leveraging Student Interests](#) | One way to strengthen relationships with students is to connect lessons to their interests outside of the classroom and make them collaborators in their own learning. This resource from EL Education offers two main ways to achieve this: 1) learning menus and 2) differentiating activities based on students' declared interests.
- [Youth-Adult Partnership Roadmap to Agency](#) | This roadmap made by *UP for Learning* provides standards by which you can measure the level of partnership you have developed with your students.

### CHANGE IDEA | QUALITY MENTORSHIP

Finding ways to deepen relationships with students can help you further leverage the power of educator-student relationships for maximum impact on your student success. This section provides resources on how to do just that.

- [Mentoring Boys and Young Men of Color](#) (BYMOC) | The systematic racism that leads to an increased risk of BYMOC becoming involved in the criminal justice system and/or being exposed to or the victims of violence, necessitates targeted strategies for making sure that they have caring mentors within our schools. In particular, "Standard 3: Training" provides a wealth of knowledge about how to approach these relationships in a culturally competent and humble manner. It also provides reflection questions to prepare you or others to effectively mentor BYMOC.
- [Mentoring in a Pandemic](#) | The strategies traditionally used to build quality relationships with students are more difficult in light of the pandemic. This guide presents a variety of resources for maintaining mentor-mentee relationships, even if you're not able to meet in person, including an in-depth [E-Mentoring Guide](#). This resource will help you think about how to build and maintain quality mentorships in a time that necessitates personal connection not be contingent on personal proximity.



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- [The Case for Building a Mentorship Program in Your School](#) | Mentorship, while rewarding, can be time intensive in a way that limits the number of substantive mentoring relationships that can be built. Building out a more substantive mentorship relationship, one which leverages community organizations, can make your school feel more integrated in the community and help your students build relationships with people outside of the school building.

### OTHER USEFUL RESOURCES

- [Education Northwest Resource Center](#) | Building authentic relationships with students is more complex than following simple tips and tricks. Doing so in a way that is equitable, anti-racist, and multiculturally sensitive requires further research and self-reflection. This resource provides insights into building relationships with students from diverse backgrounds; in ways that increase students' sense of belonging, while reducing discipline disparities.
- [Relationship Mapping](#) (Harvard Graduate School of Education) | This strategy helps ensure that each student has a relationship with at least one caring adult in school. This can also be done [virtually](#).
- [Simple Strategies](#) | This article from *Edutopia*, written by a middle school teacher, outlines six, simple, easily implementable strategies for building better relationships with your students. [This 5-minute video](#) similarly solicits advice from middle school teachers on how to build meaningful relationships.

### Language in the Guide Was Adapted From:

[1] Roehlkepartain, E. C., Pekel, K., Syvertsen, A. K., Sethi, J., Sullivan, T. K., & Scales, P. C. (2017). *Relationships First: Creating Connections that Help Young People Thrive*. Minneapolis, MN: Search Institute.

[2] Roehlkepartain, E. C., Pekel, K., Syvertsen, A. K., Sethi, J., Sullivan, T. K., & Scales, P. C. (2018). *The Developmental Relationships Framework*. Minneapolis, MN: Search Institute.

[3] "Office of Equity." Chicago Public Schools, 22 Nov. 2019, [cps.edu/equity/Pages/resources.aspx](https://cps.edu/equity/Pages/resources.aspx).