“More than just teachers:”
Building stronger student-teacher relationships to improve youth opportunities and well-being

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The Problem
• What are STRs?

• Why do they matter and for whom?

• How can we improve STRs?

• Can it really be done?
STUDENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS: WHAT ARE THEY AND WHY DO THEY MATTER?
Individual?
Institutional
Terms

- Student-teacher relationships
- Climate
- Trust
- Being known v. alienation
- Caring and politicized caring
Why STRs matter...

Strong association between STRs and academic achievement

Positive STRs can mediate impact of SES on achievement

Positive STRs are especially important for students at risk
Why STRs matter...

Positive STRs are associated with less exclusionary discipline
Also associated with higher attachment to schooling and self-esteem
STRs affect how students respond to bullying
Proceed carefully....

- Correlation or causation?
- Measurement challenges
Average Group Variations

- Racialized Minority Students
  - Weak STRs
  - Low SES
  - White or Majority Students
  - High SES
- Strong STRs
HOW CAN SCHOOLS IMPROVE STUDENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS?
Teachers

“Noticing”
Engaging beyond academics
Role breadth
TEACHERS AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Pitfalls
• Stereotypes about cultural practices
• Deficit assumptions
• Patronizing students
• Ignoring/devaluing strengths and supports in families and communities
• Striving for “color blindness”
• Moving too quickly

Promising Practices
• Developing cultural competence
• Collective understandings of classroom and school
• Politicized caring
• Earning trust carefully and intentionally
School Climate

School leader is key
“Role breadth”
Holistic view of students
Organizational Characteristics: Hard or Problematic to Change

Private, religious, small schools tend to have better STRs

Diversity makes developing strong STRs challenging

Racial mismatch between students and teachers also interferes with strong STRs
Organizational Structures: More Amenable to Change

“Looping”
Small learning communities
Reduced student-teacher ratios

Extra curricular activities
Advisories
The “Grammar” of Schooling
PUTTING RELATIONSHIPS FIRST: A PROMISING MODEL
THE BIG PICTURE LEARNING DESIGN
A Student’s Perspective
Must be...
Intentional
Multi-Leveled
Attuned to Social Context, Power, and Inequality