

The Intersection of Developmental Relationships, Equitable Environments, and SEL: A Thought Leader Session with Kent Pekel

December 10, 2020

Ian Faigley ([00:00](#)):

Well, good afternoon, everyone and welcome to today's Thought Leader round table, a conversation on readiness. Today's session is part of a regular series of explorations of the key questions of, what does it mean for all young people to be ready for life's demands at every stage and what is it going to take to get there?

Ian Faigley ([00:15](#)):

Karen Pittman, CEO, The Forum for Youth Investment leads lively and candid conversations with some of the most influential boundary pushing leaders working to improve the lives of children and young people across the United States. Today's session will feature Search Institute, Kent Pekel, and he is going to focus on the intersection of developmental relationships, equitable environments, and SEL.

Ian Faigley ([00:36](#)):

A little bit about our presenters today. Karen Pittman is President and CEO of The Forum for Youth Investment and a respected sociologist and leader in youth development. Prior to co-founding The Forum in 1998 with Merita Irby, she launched adolescent pregnancy prevention initiatives at the Children's Defense Fund, started the Center for Youth Development and Policy Research and served as Senior Vice President at the International Youth Foundation.

Ian Faigley ([00:59](#)):

Kent Pekel is President and CEO of Search Institute, an internationally recognized research organization that studies and works to strengthen youth outcomes in schools, families, out-of-school-time programs and communities. Kent is an educator who has worked at the school district, state, federal, and the university levels. Throughout his diverse career he has sought to bridge the divides that too often exists between education practice, research, and policy.

Ian Faigley ([01:25](#)):

We have a number of slides for today's presentation. Due to the huge number of people that have registered for today's call, I think it was over 500 the last time I looked, we won't be able to accept questions orally, so we ask you to type in your questions via and comments via the chat, and we'll be monitoring that and pausing at times to allow for your questions. Today's session is being recorded, all resources and materials as well as the recording will be made available on our website next week and will be sent to everyone on today's call. It's now my pleasure to turn it over to Karen.

Karen Pittman ([02:09](#)):

Thank you, Ian. 500 people is a lot. That's an amazing number and I'm excited to get started. Always excited to be able to have time to talk to Kent, who is one of my favorite people and just a provocative thinker. I put this slide up because those of you who know about the Readiness Projects know that we've joined forces with the National Urban League and the American Institutes for Research to really just figure out how we can dramatically change the odds for youth, that's The Forum's race, if we commit to upending inequities, if we really embrace science-informed strategies and accelerate progress, and we needed to accelerate progress by building forward together now.

Karen Pittman ([02:58](#)):

The science, and when we started this, the whole idea of the science was really, we understand how learning happens, we understand the power that young people have to really meet their full potential if we create context and relationships to support them. That emphasis on context and relationships is really what we're going to talk about today. Keep going in. The phrase that we've been using as we've been socializing the science learning and development is really this idea that the power that each and every adult carries. We're talking about every learner, we're talking about...

Karen Pittman (03:34):

Keep clicking for me Ian, I'm sorry, I'm not clicking myself, this go very fast. We're talking about every setting. We're talking about making sure that we're doing this in every school, every family and community organization for every learner. The thing that's come out of science, which we're going to dig right into today is the idea... and I like to call these the non-negotiables. We can call them guiding principles, but they're more than just guiding principles. What we know about the power of learning and development is, it starts with positive developmental relationships.

Karen Pittman (04:08):

We have to make sure then that we are in environments where young people feel a sense of safety and belonging. As Ken's going to talk about, we only know if they feel that if we ask them, we can't just assume that. There have to then be rich learning experiences of all kinds. We have to be very intentional about the development of not just knowledge, but skills and mindsets and habits that support the development of identity and support the development of a sense of agency. Then of course, we have to have integrated support systems so that we can meet young people's needs as we're getting to know them. These really are the non-negotiables.

Karen Pittman (04:41):

I think we've had a huge shift in our conversation over the last couple of years, starting with the CEED Commission, but really now and accelerated by... unfortunately accelerated by COVID, that if we don't start understanding, making room for relationships, we're not going to get to the learning goals that we have for young people. Next one. This conversation has clearly been happening in schools, but the thing we want to zoom in on and why I'm so excited about Kent bringing us this research, is we can't just keep talking about school and out of school or school and afterschool.

Karen Pittman (05:16):

What we really know is that when that young person walks inside of those red doors that we all... that I at least think of as school, there are all kinds of settings, where you have different adults with different expectations, with different responsibilities and different opportunities for crafting formal, non-formal or informal learning and we need to understand all of those. I'm really excited about being able to bring those forward. Education, that was in lots of places. This is a slide from last week, for those of you who are with us on the call done by [inaudible 00:05:50] at the Urban League, just to remind us of all the places where learning and development happens.

Karen Pittman (05:59):

The message that we want to really put up is that, disruption and we certainly have been in a huge time of disruption, disruption really does create an opportunity for us to think and talk differently and we're building up those language muscles, the language that we've been talking about, about developmental relationships, the language about belonging. These are words that weren't in the water that heavily five years ago and now they're where we're starting. Are we making sure that we're doing these?

Karen Pittman (06:25):

But we also have a chance to see and hear differently about who the adults are, where the peak places are that learning and development are really happening and to differentiate those so that we can act and react differently as we're creating these environments. That clearly is going to need coordination, that we have to

coordinate differently, but we can't get to coordination at the right level if we really don't understand what's happening in these settings. With that, I want to go to one more slide and then get us off the screen.

Karen Pittman (06:53):

The discussion that I think we can start today with this rich data that's going to come from Kent, is the fact that we really need to be empowering adults and young people to understand and leverage the assets that they're bringing into their settings in order to optimize their experiences. This is co-creation of learning environments. That means that we don't just assume that we pour in the curriculum, we actually need to understand the characteristics of the adults, the characteristics of the settings, the characteristics of the young people.

Karen Pittman (07:26):

We need to be much more cognizant about the fact that these things actually mix and match together in ways that the only way to optimize, is to really be much more intentional and much more transparent about what's coming in to create those experiences. With that, I am absolutely delighted to be able to say, the study that you're about to hear a little bit about, and then we'll chat with Kent about it, and please get your questions going in the chat soon, because I'm sure there'll be a lot of them, I think is one of the most significant things that we're going to be able to use to be able to bridge the research world, which is getting incredibly sophisticated about what young people need to do to make meaning, et cetera.

Karen Pittman (08:07):

I was just on a call yesterday with three brain researchers, but bridging that powerful new research into policy and practice is going to take studies like the one that Kent is going to talk to us about. With that, we will stop sharing my screen or stop sharing Ian's screen and we'll go to Kent. Kent, welcome. I'm glad to see you up on the big screen.

Kent Pikel (08:30):

Thank you so much, Karen. It's always an honor. It's always fun. I look forward to the opportunity to join you. I have always admired everything The Forum does, but in particular, this focus on changing the odds for kids as opposed to beating the odds for kids, I think should be all of our mantra these days. What does that mean for relationships, which is our subject today. I think changing the odds when it comes to relationships means not leaving relationships to chance.

Kent Pikel (08:56):

One of the first times Ian read my bio and in my 50s, I'm still trying to figure out what I want to be when I grow up, but I started as a high school teacher and then I was an administrator in an urban school district and one of the first times I experienced this issue of leaving relationships to chance was, we were like a lot of people in the 1990s trying to raise graduation rates.

Kent Pikel (09:16):

We started giving a survey, which we had never done before that asked kids about, is there someone in the school you could go to with a problem, someone who you feel knows you well? At the end of ninth grade, under half of the high school students in seven high schools in this urban school district said, someone knows me well. By 12th grade it was high 80 percents. Problem was, we had lost a lot of kids to drop out along that way.

Kent Pikel (09:43):

In fact, the biggest point of dropout was the summer between ninth and 10th grade. Half of the kids in this high school went into the summer after ninth grade feeling no one in my high school knows me well and no one in my high school is connected. Now, the good news was, in that district and places across the country, we've gotten more intentional, but it means that we're not leaving those connections to chance because we know that that's not what kids need to thrive.

Kent Pikel (10:07):

What I'm going to do today, and I'm going to move at turbo speed here so we have time for conversation. Let's see, it just said the window closed, and we got an error report, but I'm going to bring it back up. I know we're all getting used to technical difficulties here in this world. Let's try it again. How are we doing? We got it there?

Karen Pittman ([10:30](#)):

We're back. [crosstalk 00:10:31].

Kent Pekel ([10:30](#)):

Okay. That's good. This is a recent data set. It's a large data set we collected at just before COVID hit. A few kids filling out the survey and staff filling out the survey in very early March of 2020, but this really is the world before COVID. We will be over time at Search Institute as we always do, doing deeper dives into this data, we'll be publishing in journals, but as part of our commitment to be a real research and practice organization, we don't want to wait around until all the analysis is done and we publish in a journal that maybe many of you can't get access to.

Kent Pekel ([11:04](#)):

This is in the spirit of sharing some of those early findings in part, because we always benefit from the reactions of people like Karen and people like you to those findings. We have written this up in a Insights & Evidence brief that is available on our website and it's light on analysis as you will see, but it does include the data points that I'm going to quickly share with you now.

Kent Pekel ([11:25](#)):

It's a robust data set. There's 14,000 kids from grades four through 12. Most of the students filled out the data in schools, but also for those 80% in schools, we asked them about out-of-school-time and other settings, so this was just where they took the survey. 13% completed it in an out-of-school-time program. 7% completed it in a structure that we call student support programs.

Kent Pekel ([11:50](#)):

These are organizations that work in schools, but they're not staffed by people from the school, City year, Communities In Schools, other organizations that provide integrated student supports are great examples of that. We had an elementary sample, obviously it's hard for little kids to fill out surveys, but we did get a robust sample in the upper grades and then half middle school and half high school.

Kent Pekel ([12:12](#)):

Pretty balanced in terms of the gender mix and then, and not a representative sample of the country, but a diverse data set that as we go doing deeper dives into this data, we will look at more representative samples than what I'm going to give you a glimpse of today. At the core of our work at search Institute is what we call the developmental relationships framework.

Kent Pekel ([12:35](#)):

These are five critical actions that we have found young people need to experience with adults in schools and out-of-school-time programs and families in order to develop three really critical competencies for the future. A positive identity, agency and a commitment or a connection to community. In this dataset of 14,000 kids, here's what we learned about how kids experience either weak, moderate, or strong developmental relationships, which are reflective of those five elements.

Kent Pekel ([13:06](#)):

For challenging growth, which means pushing kids beyond their comfort zone, we still have the in schools and programs. Remember this is out-of-school-time, student support programs and schools. 64% of the kids were experiencing very high levels of challenging growth. Providing support means, helping kids complete tasks and achieve goals, especially ones that are important to them. That was the second highest in terms of young people experiencing that without a school time staff and with educators.

Kent Pikel ([13:33](#)):

Sharing power is giving kids voice and choice, giving them an age appropriate say, and what they're doing in their school, in their program. That was the third highest. The 53% experiencing that often and intensively. Expressing care, which is young people feeling that they matter to you, was the fourth with about half of the kids at that level. Then expanding possibilities, which is introducing young people to new people, places and ideas was the element of the framework that they actually experienced the least in this and we've seen that in other data sets as well.

Kent Pikel ([14:10](#)):

One of the reasons, as Karen said that we think it is so critical for people to be actually collecting data on developmental relationships is that we may assume that young people are experiencing the relationships as we intend them to experience them, but the data shows that that's not always the case. Here you can see in terms of strong experience of those five elements, what the out-of-school-time program staff, the students support program staff or teachers said about the relationships they build and then you can see what the kids said.

Kent Pikel ([14:38](#)):

This is a discrepancy that we've seen in dataset after dataset, and really trying to understand this is going to be a major focus of our work going forward. But the reason we think this is really critical is that, if there's any area of life in which perspective is partly reality, it's relationships and so one of the reasons we need this data is to understand how kids are experiencing relationships in these settings.

Kent Pikel ([15:00](#)):

When we actually look across this full data set, we see a relatively small but still when you aggregate it, a significant number of kids who are saying, "I'm not getting it. I'm not experiencing strong developmental relationships with teachers without a school time program staff." Another 44% experienced a moderate developmental relationship. I think it's important to say that unscientifically, you might describe a moderate development relationship as just okay.

Kent Pikel ([15:24](#)):

Certainly if you're in the bottom end of that distribution, there's a lot of room for improvement and then 46% of the kids are saying, "I'm experiencing very strong developmental relationships with my teachers, with staff and out-of-school time." You can see here the differences along racial or ethnic lines in terms of the experience of developmental relationships.

Kent Pikel ([15:45](#)):

Very interestingly and importantly, you see for a Black, Asian, and Hispanic or Latinx youth, they're actually experiencing these relationships with staff in schools and programs more often or intensively than white kids or multiracial kids. The Native American results they're the ones that are very intriguing to us as in many samples. Unfortunately, the Native kids are a smaller sample but they were enough to be statistically significant.

Kent Pikel ([16:12](#)):

We're going to really want to dig into that and understand why those young people were the least likely to be experiencing strong developmental relationships in schools and programs. Really importantly for all of us in thinking about what's going on, both during the COVID pandemic, when many schools and programs are shut down, but especially as we look to reopening, there are important differences in how kids experience developmental relationships across sectors.

Kent Pikel ([16:38](#)):

You can see they were significantly less likely to experience strong developmental relationships in schools than they were in student support programs like communities in schools or out-of-school-time settings. As a former

K-12 educator, I don't look at this data and say, let's just beat up on the schools. Schools have a lot of challenges, a lot of priorities.

Kent Pekel ([16:59](#)):

I think it, unquestionably shows schools can improve in the relational connections they create with kids, but I think it also attests to the critical need for surrounding kids with relationships through these other sectors in student support programs and out-of-school-time. I don't think it has to be an either or, it can hopefully increasingly be a web of relationships in kids' lives.

Kent Pekel ([17:21](#)):

We also saw in this dataset, not surprisingly to any of you, I'm sure, because we've known this for years, kids are much more likely at the elementary level to experience these relationships with teachers and program staff than they were at the secondary levels. I remember when I was working on those high school issues, we were talking about rigor and relevance and relationships and I think especially at the high school level, we were still really needing to keep pushing on that emphasis on relationships.

Kent Pekel ([17:51](#)):

Relationships in themselves, we think are an outcome. Social capital for young people is an outcome. But the question also is, what do relationships connect with? In this dataset we also examined, how are relationships related to these critical social emotional competencies that many of us are trying to cultivate in young people and help young people cultivate in themselves.

Kent Pekel ([18:14](#)):

Through a partnership with CASEL, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, we developed measures of their five competencies. Here's what we found when we compared kids experience of relationships to their assessment of their own social emotional competencies. We found statistically significant associations with self-management and relationships, self-awareness and relationships, responsible decision-making and relationships, social awareness and relationships and the relational competencies got the relationship skills.

Kent Pekel ([18:48](#)):

Now, for many of you out there who are research informed practitioners, your head may be screaming at this moment, correlation is not causation. Just because kids who have strong relationships report stronger social emotional competencies doesn't necessarily mean the relationships cause that, that's true. But we think there's strong reason in the science that Karen talked about at the beginning to think there is causation here at fact. That these relationships help kids develop SEL skills, because in many ways those skills are as much caught as they are taught.

Kent Pekel ([19:21](#)):

Our work going forward will be exploring the degree to which there's a causal connection between SEL and relationships, but a starting point for that work is establishing the correlation, that there is a connection between the two. Here we saw that there was one. Final piece that we looked at in this three legged stool of relationships and SEL was equity. Of course the term equity, and I think it's a hopeful sign is being used a lot these days. I think there's a challenge in defining what it means and defining practices that promote it.

Kent Pekel ([19:54](#)):

For the purposes of this conversation and there's more in that report that I referenced at the outset, I picked up three aspects that we defined as actions that promote equity in a school or in a program. One is critical reflection. Do you help kids think about why injustice and inequity exists in the world? The second is what I somewhat [inaudible 00:20:16] here call teaching about equity. The key idea there is, do you teach kids what to do when they see inequity? The third is, do kids feel that they are learning and experiencing just and safe spaces, free from bias free from discrimination?

Kent Pekel ([20:31](#)):

Here's how that broke down, you can see in terms of just and safe space, we had most kids saying, yes, I get that in my school in program, but a good number of kids saying, somewhat or a little. Fewer kids felt their school in program taught them about equity, what I can do when I see injustice and about the same amount saying I engaged in critical reflection. We also looked at the association between equitable environments and SEL in this data set. I'll just quickly break that down, the three equitable actions that I shared there and what we found.

Kent Pekel ([21:05](#)):

In terms of critical reflection, we found that kids who are in schools and programs that promote critical reflection about social justice, about what's fair in society also were statistically significantly more likely to report strong social emotional skills. We found the same for the degree to which schools and programs teach kids about equity and how to act on that in their own lives. Then finally, we found the same in terms of kids feeling that my school or program is a safe space and people like me are treated fairly.

Kent Pekel ([21:39](#)):

Final slide here, you can see we really broke the bank at Search Institute on this one and used the PowerPoint animations SmartArt that all of you probably have. But I think it summarizes a potential finding of this research that can be maybe a jumping off point for our conversation. We found in this data statistically significant associations between kids' experience of developmental relationships and social emotional competencies. That's important, it's grounds for both further research and I think further work among practitioners.

Kent Pekel ([22:18](#)):

We also found significant associations between kids' experience of equitable environments and social emotional competencies. But when we actually looked at the data to combine kids who experienced high levels of developmental relationships and equitable environments, they were even more likely to demonstrate strong social-emotional competencies. There's what we would call an interaction effect between relationships and equity in the data.

Kent Pekel ([22:41](#)):

Now we have to dig in and see if that holds true for kids in all of the demographic subgroups, but we think it's a promising finding and one that may suggest that when we create interpersonal connections between adults and kids, and then broader environments together as not an either or, that's a particularly emotional competency. I'm going to both stop sharing my screen and apologize for the fact that my light, above my computer has gone out and so I may look a little like I'm in the dark here, but I'm very much with you and let's dig into the conversation

Ian Faigley ([23:31](#)):

You are on mute, Karen.

Karen Pittman ([23:32](#)):

I'm off mute now. Always takes a second to find the button. I should know where it is by now, but it always escapes me. Thank you for that. Apologize for the whirlwind push through slides. They will all be available. Let me just say in advance, the Insights & Evidence report is extremely accessible, lots of pictures and graphs and so don't be afraid to dig into it. It is not your normal dense research report, as Kent said. It's well worth flipping through the pages.

Karen Pittman ([24:05](#)):

I'm going to start with the last question that was posed, and then we'll work backwards, because it's why we wanted to get this information out to you and put it in the context of where we are and having this even pre-pandemic, this increased understanding that context and relationships matter, and that we have a lot more that we can do than just say those words and go, "Oh, context and relationships matter." But there's a huge

amount of science that's now being translated by folks like the Search Institute into, what do we really mean by relationships?

Karen Pittman ([24:36](#)):

Then the one that we're pushing on is, what do we really mean by context? The word that Kent used of intentionality is one that we want to get to. That idea that what we saw was a decline in young people experiencing developmental relationships as they went from elementary school to high school. That we see, where develop of relationships happening more frequently when young people are in youth organizations, where there's more flexibility and more time, those don't have to be that way. We can, if we're intentional about it, up the ante.

Karen Pittman ([25:09](#)):

We can make developmental relationships the starting point and make sure all those spaces regular people spend their time are really focused on that. If we can continue to do the research like Kent and others are doing to say, we're not doing this just for the sake of making sure young people feel that they're cared for and supported, we're doing this because it directly connects to their social emotional development, which connects to their overall learning and their sense of agency, so we just have to keep pushing on this.

Karen Pittman ([25:40](#)):

One of the questions was, how do we take this out? That's the question that we really wanted to tee up. We're not going to answer it today, but we want to ask that question and answer it with you, because we think this is a different way for framing that those non-negotiables are deepening relationships. One of the comments earlier was, we noticed the unevenness and when you look at the five components of developmental relationships, they're not either.

Karen Pittman ([26:06](#)):

That relates to us to continuing to think what we do is lead with content, and our job is to get people to grow intellectually or grow in skills and not necessarily grow in those other ways and certainly not share power if they're going to have a sense of agency. We do have to really think about this more. Kent I want to start a question back to you, which is one of the first questions that came out of, all right, obviously this research was done pre-pandemic, why is it so important to get this front and center now?

Kent Pikel ([26:39](#)):

I think it's a great question and of course, just to state a very important point, how will the pandemic have changed what we learned in this data is an open question that we really... we and others need to be thinking about. We are, I think hopefully all of us reading the news and watching on the verge, literally in weeks of the distribution of a vaccine. We know that that's going to be months and months and months before things are "back to normal" if ever.

Kent Pikel ([27:09](#)):

But I think it is time and this is of course a series that Karen, and I think you've called thought leaders, which I think is... of course I'm honored to even be included in that space, part of the purpose of this is to be saying, what's next? What's over the next hill? I think what's over the next hill is at some point, whether it's in the spring or the summer or next fall is reentry into schools and programs.

Kent Pikel ([27:32](#)):

I think that this data would suggest that when we embrace or face the challenge of re-entry in schools and programs, leading with relationships, putting relationships first is the first and biggest and maybe most obvious, but not unhelpful insight from these data. We have seen again and again and again, that despite the fact that probably everyone on this call and most of us who get into this work with youth, believe powerfully in the role of relationships despite that fact in-schools and even in out-of-school-time programs, other priorities take precedence when resources are tight, when pressures are huge.

Kent Pikel ([28:17](#)):

It's easy to see, and I think we've even seen in some of the evidence around distance learning and the pandemic in the present tense, but it's easy to see how once you are in a school, in a program, in a student support program and you face the challenge of re-integrating kids who've lost a lot of time, who maybe have undergone trauma, who may be have actually lost some of their personal investment in learning, that we would rush straight to content. Whether it's the content of your curriculum or content of your program.

Kent Pikel ([28:46](#)):

I think an answer to your question, the biggest insight from these data is, relationships don't just happen and we really need to have re-entry prioritize the relationships first. That would be my biggest takeaway from this one.

Karen Pittman ([29:01](#)):

Yeah. Two questions that are in the chat. One is just the comment of, we have different settings and we know settings really are organized differently and the adult youth relationships are different in these different settings. Do we need to redesign the settings? If so, what does redesign look like?

Karen Pittman ([29:21](#)):

I think a part of that, and I'll give it back to you, a part of us wanting to emphasize even with the limitations of sample sizes, et cetera, emphasize the importance of having this data of both being able to dis-aggregate the data by race and ethnicity, but also look at the comparison between what the students think are happening and their experiences and what the educators think are happening.

Karen Pittman ([29:46](#)):

We can use that as a roadmap to say, yes, if we want to be intentional about this and intentional about specifying what we mean by the characteristics of developmental relationships, we have a lot of room to basically get people to be more intentional with young people, understanding this is the goal as well.

Karen Pittman ([30:05](#)):

How quickly we can move all of the systems and all of the settings to do this, is a question, but I'll get back to you again, because I know this is some of the early work that Search did. One of the challenges that we face at The Forum certainly and with the Readiness Projects is that when we talk school, we tend to think teachers in classrooms.

Karen Pittman ([30:24](#)):

There's a lot of room for the development of developmental relationships with other adults in the building, in other settings in the building. Is that something and the fact that you really had those student support services mentioned and saw them sitting in between the youth organizations, et cetera. When we're saying redesigned, does this redesign all does it start in the classroom? Or is there something we can do with that finding that there can be adults in the building with slightly different roles who can be really the developers of relationships?

Karen Pittman ([30:58](#)):

What can we do with this immediately and as we're thinking forward into the next 18 months to get people to really not think of, just focus on relationships is what we need to do now in the middle of a crisis and a pandemic, but what we really need to do to see youth success?

Kent Pikel ([31:14](#)):

Yeah, I think it's such a powerful point. The role that not just, of course counselors and school psychologists can play in this, which we've known that for a long time, though they have caseloads that are too big and things. But educational assistance, everyone, people who are in the school, in an operation setting, people in the lunchroom, people who are there and then bringing in community organizations.

Kent Pekel ([31:39](#)):

I think one of the things that embracing a relationships first agenda for your school or program can do for those folks who are adults in these buildings who are not teachers and I say this is a former teacher is, this can be incredibly, both legitimating and enabling to them. If you actually name, building developmental relationships with young people as a primary priority of your school or program, and then you look around at what are your human resources to get that done.

Kent Pekel ([32:03](#)):

You realize that exactly as you say, Karen, there are a lot of adults in schools who want to do that, who are passionate about that, but who need time and support to actually do that. I think broadening the circle of relationship builders and the definition of relationship builders in schools, who our staff in schools is huge. The second piece as you were saying is, building partnerships with student support organizations and out-of-school-time that are explicitly relationship focused.

Kent Pekel ([32:30](#)):

Back in the days that I began this discussion talking about when I was working as administrator in urban school district, we constantly talked about partnerships with out-of-school-time and community organizations, but we very often struggled with what really was the through line across them. We were working on literacy during the school day and we had a wonderful community organization that wanted to work on...

Kent Pekel ([32:54](#)):

I remember one in particular, the Jane Addams School for Democracy, they wanted to do community empowerment and they were very different. We wanted to collaborate. We didn't have a through line across that. 30 years later, I would today be saying that through line these relationships that we're actually... those are endeavors that are different in their focus, but they could have a common emphasis on expressing care, challenging growth, provide support, sharing power.

Kent Pekel ([33:18](#)):

I think it really... As we think about re-entry through relationships, it is the right time for leaders like those on this call to begin thinking ahead. I just actually, I have to say somebody who is here mentions a man who died here about... I mean, it's a mile from my home, Philando Castile, worked in the lunchroom at the elementary school that my sister went to and I went to another school across town, one in St. Paul, Minnesota because of busing at the time, but Philando is who was subsequently killed in a police incident.

Kent Pekel ([33:53](#)):

For anybody in that community, he was legendary for doing this in that school, as the man in the lunchroom building developmental relationships with kids and it was one reason why his death resonated so strongly across the community here in St. Paul. Sophia put that in the chat and I just want to share that. The one other quick point I would add, Karen, and you mentioned the discrepancy between the youth and adult perspectives on relationships. I just want to share with you and the folks here, two hypotheses for that, that have come up in our early questioning about it.

Kent Pekel ([34:28](#)):

We haven't looked at this rigorously. One hypothesis for that is that kids and adults just define what is caring or what is challenging in some fundamentally different ways. We actually, is, what the kids think as caring fundamentally different than the staff. That's one hypothesis. Another hypothesis is, not so much that kids define them differently, but that when a teacher or a youth program staff person fills out that survey, they're thinking of certain kids, but not all kids.

Kent Pekel ([35:01](#)):

When you say, do you care about kids? Do you challenge? Do you expand possibility? They respond at very high levels because they're thinking about some kids, but that if all kids don't experience those elements, when the

youth spills out that survey, they're going to report it at much lower levels because they didn't get it. It's an open question for us, why we find that discrepancy, not just in this data set, but in many, many others and those are two hypothesis. I would say it's not necessarily an either, or that might explain part of the difference that we see in that data.

Karen Pittman (35:31):

Right. Absolutely. There are a bunch of questions as you're scrolling about the data, and I know you're going to do more to desegregate the data, even though your sample was 60% right, your sample is big enough that you can do some of those desegregated analysis. I want to shift from... There was also a question of whether you did, or you were able to ask about sexual orientation. Was that something that you actually collected data on?

Kent Pikel (35:59):

I saw that as well. It's one of those times when you're on a live chat like this, I did not... because I'm the worst multi-tasker ever start texting my colleagues at Search Institute. I'm assuming we did. We almost always do. I would be surprised if we didn't in this dataset, but I don't know off the top of my head if we did. We have looked at other studies in which we have looked at both developmental relationships and developmental assets for LGBTQ youth and so I don't know why we wouldn't do it.

Kent Pikel (36:28):

In this one Insights & Evidence brief, we obviously wanted to focus on just a few nuggets of data and so it's not in that brief, but I will absolutely, as soon as we're done here, be emailing my colleagues on the research and practice team and asking if we did look at that. It's a critical focus going forward and I would imagine that it's in this data set. I'll be disappointed if it's not, but we will look at that and we can maybe put a blast out on our website to let people know that we'll continue to dig into that issue too.

Karen Pittman (37:00):

One other question is just on the survey and the sample. In addition to the racial and ethnic demographics, what were the income demographics? Is this all kids, is this predominantly low-income communities, is this free and reduced lunch? Did you have a target population that you were going after?

Kent Pikel (37:20):

It's self-report data from the kid on income, and we have a measure that's been very effectively used, but it's the kids self-report measure, what we call economic strain. In my family, we have enough to buy everything we want, sometimes we struggle to buy basic necessities and it is a very diverse data set in terms of that representation of self-reported economic strain and with a bias toward kids in the low-income categories. I don't have the breakdown percentage-wise, but going forward we will be able to take a look at it.

Kent Pikel (37:50):

The one thing, and this is getting a little bit into the methodological weeds here, but I know it's an inherently research interested group that joins with something like this, one, we've looked at the... there is a strong association between kids self-reported economic strain in their family and the free and reduced price lunch data in schools. We've looked at that in previous studies. One thing that's interesting though is that, the kids self-reported income of their families is always significantly higher than the free and reduced price reported level.

Kent Pikel (38:24):

The hypothesis behind that is that either these parenting adults or others are helping those kids grow up in ways where they don't feel that they're deprived or that they're lacking resources. That said, it is when we're doing a study like this, where we aren't getting a separate data set from the school or program from their... in their family income data, it's a good proxy and so that will certainly be used in the analysis going forward.

Karen Pittman (38:49):

Okay. Good. A couple of comments that have come in about how relevant this is not just by race and ethnicity, but for low income communities, communities of concentrated poverty. In your questions about equity, one of the questions was opportunities for critical reflection. I want to take a second to land on that because I won't put the slides back up, but in the science of learning and development, as we're understanding how learning happens, one of the things that's coming out to be absolutely most critical for both young people's development of those social emotional competencies, but also their sense of agency and their sense of identity is meaning-making.

Karen Pittman ([39:32](#)):

Meaning-making is really this idea of not just, I got the content or I can reflect and say, "Yes, I feel it," but I actually get to reflect more abstractly and say, "What does this mean to me?" Your question about, are young people being given experiences, where they can really think and reflect on racial injustice, on other things going on in their communities and asking the question, not just how do I feel about it, but what does it mean for me? What can I do about it? Those kinds of questions are really critically important.

Karen Pittman ([40:05](#)):

The Brain Research is showing and then literally as the brain research is showing that when you get that combination of things happening in the brain, acceleration happens on all fronts to get the people moving forward. One of the things that I think as people are saying, what do we do with this? The idea of not just, of fully thinking about relationships and the way you're defining developmental relationships, but really if we go back to that blue wheel, making sure that the content, making sure that the experiences we're giving young people have adequate time for reflection.

Karen Pittman ([40:38](#)):

We're not just pushing content at them, and they're big enough, they're challenging enough in terms of the ideas and they're relevant enough for them so that they really can dig in and make meaning out of them, which accelerates all the skill growth that we want. But it also comes back to deepen those relationships. At the point at which I've trusted you enough to have a really serious conversation about what's going on in my life, or in my community and why it's happening and where it's happening elsewhere, a deep, maybe the gap between the kid and the teacher in terms of experiences closes because we're having those.

Karen Pittman ([41:10](#)):

I just want to emphasize there's a circle here that we're really trying to get people to think about. To the question of how do we do this now? What we have right now is the gift that people are saying, take the time to do it. I mean, in school and youth work, take the time to do it, acknowledge that young people need it and then find more fit people who are trying to help them. Whether it will be that generous a year from now, depends on how we use research like this, how we really set up a learning conversation.

Karen Pittman ([41:40](#)):

I'm going to give you back one more question, which is the question of dosage. Does it matter or I'm assuming it does matter, how can we really demonstrate that, not just when young people are in experiences and contexts in which these relationships are happening, in which SEL growth is happening, in which they're experiencing equity at a higher level, not just that when that's there it's good, but that the more they're in those and the more consistent those are, how do we move from just getting information like this, to turning this to a set of questions, to say, ultimately, if we're going to talk about equity, we need to know dosage?

Karen Pittman ([42:18](#)):

We need to know in a young person's life, how much of this do they have? How many places can they go to get it? Do they have fallback mechanisms for making this happen? Can you put your research hat on and ask how we go from survey data to actually giving communities a way to ask, are kids getting what they need and then asking them where they're getting it? Can we make that shift in real time?

Kent Pikel ([42:42](#)):

I love the question on dosage and I will come right to it. I just want to say amen to your point that I hope didn't slide by people, because it would have slid by me 20 years ago about the virtuous circle that can happen when we engage in that. You were talking about critical reflection with kids and then I was like, "Oh God, I hope she's going to make this point," and you did. Doing that also builds the relationship.

Kent Pekel ([43:07](#)):

That's this wonderful tradition that I've really learned since I've been at Search Institute, which is positive youth development. It was very separate from the world that I started first 20 years of my career in which was education, that when we invest in those competencies, the relationship itself has also deepened and that's the magic of the ordinary magic piece here. I want to make sure...

Kent Pekel ([43:27](#)):

There was a point where I was doing a presentation for a bunch of researchers of learning mindsets and Carol Dweck was there, who many of you know is a very prominent researcher of creating growth mindset. The one thing I said in my presentation, I said, "Of these ingenious experiments that you've used to prove that how kids see their intelligence influences their motivation are also great relationship building experiences. When you work with a kid on growth mindset, it actually strengthens the relationship, leaving aside the benefit that it has, the kid feels known, seen, connected."

Kent Pekel ([43:59](#)):

On the issue of dosage, this is one where I agree with you, it's critical, but we also have to be careful. I was just referencing the work that I've been privileged to learn about in positive youth development during my time at Search Institute and in the previous work we did on developmental assets, which were factors, internal and external that correlate with youth success, there was one study that seemed to show an inflection point at the number of adults in kids' lives and the number was three.

Kent Pekel ([44:29](#)):

This predates me there, but some of my colleagues who were around for doing that research, they wince when they hear that, because once the number three adults got out of the gate, people would continually say, "It's three. It's three. I need to know the number three." I understand that, people wanted something tangible but in fact, the data was a slope and three was just a pivot point and kids did well with two and one and kids didn't do well with four and five and six.

Kent Pekel ([44:55](#)):

We want to be cautious in thinking about the dosage question and we get the dosage question in two ways in our current work on relationships. One, just like the assets example is how many adults? Then the second is, how often? The somewhat frustrating answer I need to give you though you invited a research answer is this is cause for further study. We do have a new project that is underway right now, and it's called Cultivating Connections and it is to map the experience of developmental relationships here in our home State of Minnesota, but across the whole state in out-of-school-time and schools.

Kent Pekel ([45:34](#)):

We're looking at precisely the question you're asking, Karen, how often are kids engaged in activities that are related to developmental relationships? Then, to what extent do staff in these schools and programs have the systems and supports they need to build those relationships? Do they have professional development? Do they ever get data? Do their leaders emphasize relationships? Do they have a community of practice around relationships to share strategies?

Kent Pekel ([46:02](#)):

That Cultivating Connection study is ongoing right now. It's challenging to do in the pandemic, but we're making it happen and we will have findings from that effort, next summer. It is explicitly focused on better understanding of the context within out-of-school-time and schools for the experience of developmental

relationships. Within that, we're thinking hard about this dosage question. We know it's really important, we don't want to have though a magic number that people seize in their minds, that paradoxically sets us back.

Karen Pittman (46:35):

Yeah, I agree. The word... We may need a different word than dosage. I brought that word into the conversation because I was just in a conversation with school folks talking about accountability and the conversation there was attendance. Well, if you're used to counting attendance as seat time, you have to be someplace in order to start a relationship. Now we're not using seat time and we want to come out into this broader world of after-school, out-of-school, youth development, community programs, social justice programs.

Karen Pittman (47:07):

We're not going to measure seat time, but we want to know whether you're there and then we want to know the quality. There's just a conversation to be had about, if we're really convinced that these opportunities happen everywhere and that there are more places than schools and certainly more places in classrooms where there are adults with resources and skills, who are intentionally trying to create these kind of environments for young people and create these kinds of experiences.

Karen Pittman (47:35):

How do we capture that? How do we map it? How do we measure it? How do we do that? I think in particular, as you started to do, how do we show that there are differentials? That the young person or a certain kind of young person who's not going to be... [inaudible 00:47:52] not feeling connected in one setting feels connected in a different one. There's just a whole another way to have this conversation, but one of the things that we're anxious to do is to figure out how we take the next step of bringing us into community with practical tools.

Karen Pittman (48:06):

You have a couple of questions about practical tools. Are the survey items that you use, or the things that you use available? Can people use these in their own communities and in their own programs?

Kent Pekel (48:17):

Yeah. Thank you for that question. We have... these measures were developed through a series of research studies, everything from studies of civic development funded by the National Science Foundation, the studies of academic motivation funded by the Institute for Education Sciences, but as an applied research organization, we never want those measures just to sit on the shelf in a journal. All of the measures in the report are available through what we're now calling the developmental relationship survey.

Kent Pekel (48:43):

It actually really is, survey is plural. It's a modular set of measures that schools and out-of-school-time programs can use with not just kids, but also with staff. We're non-profit, we try and make these things as available as we can for as lower cost as we are able to through a recent investment from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, we are going to be able to make some subset of these measures available at very low cost or no cost.

Kent Pekel (49:11):

This is very recent development and we're pretty excited about it. In early 2021, we will be rolling out an opportunity for people to collect these data without paying us anything. Of course, we wish we could always do that, but thanks to the Gates Foundation we're going to be able to do that for a period. That in the foundation's mind and ours is part of exactly what, Karen, you've convened this discussion around, it's getting ready for re-entry through relationships. How do we actually begin to become intentional and collect those data?

Kent Pekel (49:43):

But even beyond that support from the foundation, those measures will continue to be available from our organization. If you go to searchinstitute.org, you can get all the information on that that's there as well. The one thing I'll just say too is, if for whatever reason, because your school or program just, you don't have the bandwidth to collect data, or you don't have the money to collect data, you can and should still collect your own data on relationships.

Kent Pekel ([50:08](#)):

A famous way that folks have done it and the Making Caring Common Project that Harvard has done a nice job synthesizing this, is you basically get the names of all the kids you serve and you get staff together and you actually... and you could do this virtually, or you could do this once we're all back together, you haven't put a dot by somebody that they know well. You can flip that, you also could have the young people do that.

Kent Pekel ([50:32](#)):

It is a potentially very powerful way to look at the kids you serve and see who doesn't have a dot by their name. The one big caveat, and this is kind of a no-brainer, but I think all of us understand how this can happen because people are so busy is, once you do that, you actually then have to do something to connect with the kids. Don't do what we call the dot exercise and then not act on it, or don't give the survey and then not act on it. But don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good here. Just jump in to try and understand how kids are experiencing those relationships in your setting.

Karen Pittman ([51:08](#)):

Right. I mean, I'm glad you gave that example because that's one of my favorites that you all did the dot exercise. I think I was even in the room when it happened and it has an immediate and a powerful impact on both the adults and the young people. Again, if you're doing this and intentionally getting all the adults in the building to put their dots up, you realize there's more adults in the building if we're just like dividing dots. I mean, dividing names on the wall by people, by adults, the ratio gets a whole lot better if we count all the adults.

Karen Pittman ([51:38](#)):

Two, a lot of those adults that you don't think about put dots up. "I know this kid because they come in the cafeteria every day and they talk to me." "I know them because I drive the bus." Then, again we come back to this idea of how we're really supporting those relationships and using them as the beginning of pushing through, it's really important. This is a conversation that we could do for a long time and we're going to keep doing it.

Karen Pittman ([52:04](#)):

Those of you who are on the call and I've noticed at the end that most of the questions have just been coming to the panelist, which is fine, but as we put the video back out, we will put the questions and the comments back out to you and we'll try to answer some of them if we go through and we didn't answer them and we can.

Karen Pittman ([52:20](#)):

One thing that I do want to acknowledge, Kent, you mentioned positive youth development, obviously, people who know me, sometimes people call me the grandmother of youth development or at this point, the great-grandmother of youth development, but we are also at a moment in time because of the deepening understanding of context and experience and I think the deepening understanding of what was always there in the British version of youth development.

Karen Pittman ([52:47](#)):

Our goal is not just to build competencies, but to help young people find their journey to identity and agency and power, that we have to have better language. Someone asks about, should we call it positive youth development or should we really be talking about social justice youth development? They've dropped some things in the chat, we'll give you all of those tools.

Karen Pittman (53:10):

We've got, in SEL and you used the famous CASEL wheel SEL. CASEL is really in the process of talking now about transformative SEL. Not that you don't stay with those five broad competency areas, but that you push them through so this isn't just building competencies so that you can do better in school, it's building competencies so that you can do an analysis of why your school isn't working for you, of why your community suffers with chronic rates of crime and poverty. It's building those skills.

Karen Pittman (53:41):

There was definitely a movement there, lots of different ways to talk about it, but really important that we put all of this together. Again, just back to this, relationships are the door in, but they aren't the only thing. Thank you for pushing us to define relationships, developmental relationships beyond caring. Then I will continue to thank my colleagues at the SoLD Alliance and Turnaround for Children in particular, to just give us these non-negotiables of, if we're really trying to optimize youth thriving, there are a set of non-negotiables and for better, for worse, we have environments that have to emphasize some, but not all.

Karen Pittman (54:19):

In some ways, even giving young people, I mean, this is the thing I'd love to do, giving young people a very simple tool to go in to the environments where they spend time, name it, say who's there and then ask, in terms of those characteristics, are you getting these things? To somehow connect the quality of the experience they have with their assessment of the quality of the environment in some way, is a next step for us to be able to just activate the openness that we have right now, of acknowledging that, learning happens everywhere and sometimes it doesn't happen anywhere and there's something we can do about it that's more intentional.

Karen Pittman (54:55):

Kent, I'm going to give you the very last word, then I'm going to hand it back to Ian and I will... Before I get it back to Ian, I'll make a plug and Ian, be ready to drop this in the chat for a conversation we're going to have next Tuesday, that we're opening up to a broader group, the last in our, make the invisible, visible discussion series. But Kent, final word.

Kent Pekel (55:17):

I'm just going to echo what you just said about intentionality. When you begin to take developmental relationships seriously and especially if you collect some kind of objective data from the young people you serve, it can be difficult. It can raise difficult issues of resources and race and equity and things, but here's the really hopeful point, this is something you, and we can do something about. This is eminently within our power.

Kent Pekel (55:42):

We do not need to have all of the resource flows and society change to build more developmental relationships within schools and programs and community organizations with kids. It can be challenging, but it's doable, it's actionable. I think that's a hopeful way to think about the big challenges that we have, but they are ones that we're up to.

Karen Pittman (56:05):

Excellent. Well, thank you for that. Ian has dropped a link into the chat. Next week, as we head into the holidays, we'll have a conversation with an incredible lineup of folks who are education leaders from Turnaround for Children and the Education Council, we'll have House Reps from the National Urban League. We'll have Ross Wiener from the Aspen Institute. Hedy Chang from Attendance Works, talking to us about...

Karen Pittman (56:33):

They're experts in education accountability, and they're all watching with interest or trepidation depending on the day of whether or not in this time of disruption we actually can move forward and get rid of some of the things that have been barriers or we end up coming back, we have a vaccine, we go back. Hopefully, we don't

go back. But one, the questions that we're going to ask them is, can we in this moment think about community accountability in a different way?

Karen Pittman ([56:59](#)):

This is not just school accountability, and are we going to use seat time and is it going to be standardized tests, but can we broaden this? This conversation has been really useful in that space just to get people warmed up and thinking, and you guys in the chat have been a great and engaged audience and I thank you. Ian, last words.

Ian Faigley ([57:17](#)):

Thank you very much to both Kent and Karen. I hope that everyone will be able to join us next Tuesday and have a wonderful afternoon. Thank you very much for spending an hour with us.

Karen Pittman ([57:27](#)):

Thank you.

Ian Faigley ([57:27](#)):

Thank you.

Kent Pikel ([57:29](#)):

Thank you so much.

Karen Pittman ([57:31](#)):

Thank you all.