Empirical Article

"People First, Students Second": Considerations for Building Trusting Relationships Between Educational Professionals and Adolescents in Schools

Tarsha I. Herelle[1] (iD), Martha Abele Mac Iver[1] (iD), and Mariko Yoshisato Cavey[2] (iD)

Abstract
Students' relationships with adults in educational environments require careful consideration from researchers and practitioners as we seek to improve educational outcomes, particularly for those who have been historically underserved. This qualitative case study extends research on the development of student-teacher trust to a broader group of adults within the school by focusing on the work of City Year (CY) AmeriCorps members (ACMs), serving as in-school student success coaches and their in-school CY leaders, Impact Managers. We use data from adult student success coaches and leaders in two urban districts to examine how young adults temporarily serving in student support roles developed trusting relationships with youth and how they perceived their contribution to students' academic and social-emotional growth. Findings show despite the

[1]Center for Social Organization of Schools, School of Education, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD, USA
[2]Department of Educational Foundations, Organizations, and Policy, School of Education, University of Pittsburgh, PA, USA

Corresponding Author:
Tarsha I. Herelle, Center for Social Organization of Schools, School of Education, Johns Hopkins University, 2800 North Charles Street, Baltimore, MD 21218, USA.
Email: therell1@jhu.edu

temporal nature of their role, CY staff across sites and grade levels develop trust with students by using human-centered approaches, being vulnerable and honest with students, and setting clear boundaries. The participants' voices in this study provide interpersonal strategies for teachers, teaching assistants, counselors, mentors, and staff to consider when building holistic and authentic relationships with students.

Introduction

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, traumatic stressors continue to impact students' mental well-being and academic outcomes, both of which are integral to student success (Balfanz & Whitehurst, 2019; Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022). Further, as concerns for teacher turnover and retention in urban schools persist (Kamrath & Bradford, 2020), opportunities for students to develop trusting relationships with teachers and other adults are especially important to support youths' academic development (Murray, 2009; Romero, 2010) and epistemic agency (Platz, 2021). Undoubtedly, COVID-19 propelled schools to (re)consider how educational practices and students' everyday interactions with adults in schools can foster school connectedness and cultivate social and emotional well-being. This study examines how young adults serving in student support roles developed trusting relationships with youth and how they perceived their contribution to students' academic and social-emotional growth.

Research on school connectedness and adolescent development highlights how the relationships youth develop with adults in schools can be critical to ensuring their healthy development and school success (Catalano et al., 2004; Libbey, 2004; Pianta, 1999). School connectedness provides students with a sense of being cared for, supported, and belonging at school (Huh, 2022), and trust is an essential element to building positive student-educator relationships (Brake, 2020). When students have trusting relationships with adults in school, improvements are seen in attendance, retention, engagement, and achievement. Students' relationships with teachers, counselors, and mentors further contribute to the development of protective factors, including increased school engagement and decreased behavioral concerns (Claro & Perelmiter, 2022). While teacher-student relationships are undeniably critical

for student's academic success, students' relationships with other adults in school, such as mentors and non-teaching staff, also play an essential role in students' education, work, and mental health outcomes (Anderson, 2019; Rhodes & DuBois, 2006). Scholars examining the impact of school-based mentorship programs impact on student outcomes found students' relationships with mentors contributed to decreasing school dropout rates and risk-taking behaviors, reducing absenteeism, increasing school attachment and student's self-esteem and overall life satisfaction (Fehérvári & Varga, 2023; Gordon et al., 2013). Thus, students' relationships with adults in educational environments require careful consideration from researchers and practitioners as we seek to improve educational outcomes, particularly for those who have been historically underserved. After placing this issue within a theoretical and research framework, this qualitative case study extends research on the development of student-teacher trust to a broader group of adults within the school by focusing on the work of City Year (CY) AmeriCorps members (ACMs), serving as in-school student success coaches and their in-school CY leaders (Impact Managers) across two school districts. We use data from adult student success coaches and leaders in two urban districts to examine how young adults temporarily serving in student support roles developed trusting relationships with youth and how they perceived their contribution to students' academic and social-emotional growth.

Conceptual Framework

We situate our research investigation within the framework of informal or natural mentoring, which is increasingly recognized as a means through which schools can influence student academic and postsecondary outcomes (Kraft et al., 2023; Pittman et al., 2020; Varga et al., 2023). Research suggests this occurs through the conversations and interpersonal interactions in the mentoring process that contribute not only to cognitive development but also to social and emotional and identity development (Kraft et al., 2023; Miranda-Chan et al., 2016; Rhodes, 2005). The social support from adults, particularly school-based adults, plays a fortifying role that increases the emotional energy students need in confronting challenging academic tasks and social experiences (Varga et al., 2023).

We argue that such school-based informal mentoring relationships can be viewed as an extension and broadening of the well-researched teacher-student relationship (TSR), itself viewed as part of a developmental system including the influences of parents, family members, and other adults outside the school system, characteristics of individuals within the school system, as well as the classroom and school environments (Pianta et al., 2003). It is

useful to situate the role of school-based adults providing informal or natural mentoring within the extensive TSR research. Given the considerable evidence that mentoring and TSRs are positively related to student engagement and achievement (Poling et al., 2022; Ryan & Deci, 2020) and support students' sense of belonging, self-efficacy, autonomy, and motivation for learning (Anderman & Leake, 2005; LaGuardia & Ryan, 2002; Lee, 2007), we discuss how ACMs relationships with students develop, focusing on the role of trust.

Relationships and Student Academic Outcomes

Several meta-analyses provide evidence of the positive relationship between TSRs and student outcomes in engagement and achievement. Early reviews focused on associations between teacher communication and student outcomes (Allen et al., 2021; Witt et al., 2004). Framing teacher relationships with students as "person-centered" and "learner-centered," characterized by empathy, warmth, and genuineness, Cornelius-White's (2007) meta-analysis found positive correlations between such relational characteristics and student academic outcomes. Results of the meta-analysis conducted by Roorda et al. (2011) indicated stronger positive associations for effective TSR with student engagement than with student achievement measures, though results with achievement measures reached moderate levels. These findings were particularly pronounced for secondary students. Quin (2017) focused on student engagement outcomes, finding positive associations between TSR variables and both objective and subjective measures of student engagement (attendance, behavior, course grades, and self-reported levels of psychological engagement). Meta-analyses and systematic reviews of school-based mentoring programs, involving relationships with adults other than classroom teachers, have shown small but generally positive (or mixed) impacts on student outcomes (DuBois et al., 2002, 2011; Raposa et al., 2019; Wheeler et al., 2010).

How Do Positive TSRs Develop?

Teachers build social connections with students in multiple ways. They take time to demonstrate care and concern about what is going on in students' lives, practice active and empathetic listening, and offer opportunities for one-on-one conferencing (Brake, 2020; Demerath et al., 2022; Mawhinney & Sagan, 2007; Russell et al., 2016). Emphasizing shared interests or similarities strengthens relational bonds and can positively impact student outcomes (Gehlbach et al., 2016; Mawhinney & Sagan, 2007). When teachers

demonstrate respect for students, holding positive views of their capabilities and minimizing criticism, students engage more readily in learning (Demerath et al., 2022).

Teachers' efforts to create classroom environments that cultivate student competence also contribute to positive TSRs that motivate students to learn. When teachers have high expectations, believe in students' ability to grow, offer students the opportunity to relearn and improve on work they have submitted, and develop and implement learning and assessment structures that emphasize the process of mastery, students respond with increased engagement (e.g., Demerath et al., 2022; Johnston et al., 2019; Scales et al., 2020; Wentzel, 2009, Wentzel et al., 2016; Wigfield & Tonks, 2002; Wormeli, 2018). Students notice when teachers are invested in their success, and they respond with more effort.

Teacher-student relationships centering opportunities for student autonomy and choice also help students feel respected and valued (Fredricks et al., 2019; Martin et al., 2007; Pendergast & Kaplan, 2015; Ruzek et al., 2016). Reeve and Cheon (2021, p. 56) outline several instructional practices with evidence of creating autonomy support. They discuss strategies that increase intrinsic motivation and support internalization. They emphasize that a laissez-faire approach that provides choices with no support can exacerbate student frustration and does not yield the same positive results.

Teachers may not automatically know how to build positive relationships with students to foster caring social connections, mastery, and autonomy, but teachers can improve in this area, and there is evidence that higher levels of teacher self-efficacy are associated with more positive TSRs (Hajovsky et al., 2020). Different types of interventions that focus on teacher reflection and improving interpersonal skills tend to have differential effects on TSRs, depending on teacher characteristics or specific relational skills (Spilt et al., 2012). While the research on interventions to improve TSRs is growing, a greater focus on adolescent populations is needed (Poling et al., 2022).

The Role of Trust in Student Relationships With Adults at School

Researchers have long recognized the crucial role of trust in educational organizations (e.g., Bidwell, 2001; Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Coleman, 1988; Tschannen-Moran, 2001; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000) and have begun to examine trust as a critical component of TSRs. Relational trust in schools involves respect, fulfilling obligations, meeting expectations, and personal regard that goes beyond what is required or involves sacrifice (Schneider

et al., 2014). TSRs characterized by warmth, trust, and honesty are correlated with students' attendance, grades, and ability to adapt to new situations (Allensworth & Easton, 2007). Gregory and Ripski (2008) focused on student trust in teacher authority and reported this mediated a positive relationship between teachers' relational approach to discipline and student behavior. Results from a qualitative study of urban ninth-grade teachers and students (Brake, 2020) identified several practices that build students' trust and contribute to their sense of well-being at school: flexibility and patience with student behaviors, setting clear norms, and regular conferencing between students and teachers to support relational development and learning. Another qualitative study (Demerath et al., 2022) emphasized teacher characteristics of empathy, respect, belief in student capabilities, pedagogical skill in engaging students, and commitment to providing help as critical in the process of building trust with students. These studies suggest trust is a fundamental component of healthy relationships with students and has positive implications for student achievement and outcomes.

Similarly, scholars identify trust between mentors and youth as a fundamental element that needs to be fostered to create an authentic mentor-mentee connection (Donlan et al., 2017; Hart et al., 2024). In a qualitative study examining the characteristics and practices that promote the formation of high-quality relationships between mentors and youth, Donlan et al. (2017) highlight five key features of the mentor-mentee relationship that promote trust and positive youth development. The findings reflect both mentor and youth's perspectives on the process of relationship building and illustrate a model Donlan et al. (2017) refer to as TRICS (The right one, Respect, Information gathering, Consistency, and Support). Participants reported that the right one encompasses personality, background, and ways of being characteristics of the mentors that make relationships more likely to develop. Findings underscored the importance of mentors and youth's mutual respect and mentor's consistency—described as being available and present on a regular basis as critical to deepening trusting and healthy relationships. Four types of support were identified as contributing to trust and relationship building: instrumental (e.g., providing resources), emotional (e.g., listening and showing care), informational (e.g., giving advice), and appraisal (e.g., offering honest feedback presented in a caring way).

Overall, much of the prior scholarship on trust in schools highlights the important role of teachers in cultivating trusting TSRs, and many quantitative studies show evidence for the positive impact of strong TSRs on multiple measures of student achievement outcomes. Often, less discussed in the literature are adults who serve in relatively short-term positions in schools but have an essential role in supporting student development, such as tutors,

mentors, and success coaches (Donlan et al., 2017). Furthermore, these support roles are urgently needed today to help schools address students' pandemic recovery needs amidst ongoing staff shortages. In this study focusing on school-based staff from CY, one of the nation's largest youth-serving educational organizations, we center the voices and experiences of young adults who served in "near-peer" roles as student success coaches in school and out-of-school time settings. Using data from observations, interviews, and focus groups, we illuminate strategies that CY staff used to effectively develop trusting relationships that supported students' academic and social-emotional growth including using human-centered approaches such as having "a people-first students second" mindset, being vulnerable and honest with students, and setting "warm-strict" boundaries.

Study Context and Methods

This qualitative case study builds on prior studies by the research team focused on the relationship between student interactions with CY team members in their classrooms and students' social-emotional and academic outcomes (Balfanz & Brynes, 2020, 2021). We extend research on the development of student-teacher trust to a broader group of adults within the school by focusing on the work of CY, a national service organization formed in 1988 that currently places over 3000 ACMs in about 350 schools across almost 30 U.S. cities. ACMs can be high school or college graduates and are trained in a holistic approach to provide students with integrated academic and social-emotional support throughout the school day (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2020, 2021; Bryson, 2022; Corrin et al., 2016; Norton, 2013).

At each of CY's partner schools, small teams of ACMs work with teachers to support students' academic and social-emotional development by connecting with and building positive relationships with students (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2020; Eckels, 2023). Through strengths-based approaches, they cultivate students' skills through individual interactions, responding to immediate needs in-the-moment, and implementing supportive interventions in small and large groups. ACMs are led by Impact Managers (IMs), who typically have prior experience as ACMs. IMs support a team of ACMs in monitoring students' academic progress, fostering positive relationships with school partners, and providing ongoing leadership development to ACMs at their site.

To understand the dynamics of CY staff interactions with students and how they relate to student development, we explored these research questions:

RQ1: How do CY staff describe how they develop relationships with students? What role do they see trust playing in the formation of relationships with students?

RQ2: How do CY staff perceive the strength of the developmental relationship between students and ACMs? How much do they perceive that it varies across the different students an ACM supports?

RQ3: How do CY staff perceive different degrees of developmental relationships affecting students' social-emotional and academic outcomes? What are the challenges they perceive as hindering relationship building? What factors do they see as supporting relationship building?

Participants

As a national nonprofit youth development organization, CY serves communities throughout the country. This study was conducted with two large urban districts where CY had established school partnerships and had placed corps members to serve in student support roles as ACMs and IMs. One district was located on the west coast and the other was in the southeast region of the United States (U.S.). Individual CY staff participants came from 12 elementary and middle schools equally distributed across the two districts. Although students were not interviewed for this study, the school populations were composed of underserved racial and ethnic groups (primarily Black and Latine/x), and all students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. ACM and IM participants were mostly women under age 30, and the racial diversity of the group reflected CY's focus on recruiting young adults who represent the communities they serve.

The districts, school sites, and individual staff members represented in this study reflect both intentional selection as well as a convenience sample. Intentionally, we prioritized regional diversity when recruiting participants from districts that CY serves. We sent recruitment emails to all principals and CY staff at partner school sites in these districts, and individuals who responded to express interest were provided with detailed information about the study. Then, school participation was ultimately determined based on which principals granted permission for us to facilitate interviews and focus groups with their staff, and conduct onsite observations of interactions between students, ACMs, and IMs. Once the participating schools were identified, we utilized a snowball sampling method to secure individual participants for interviews, focus groups, and observations. Although any CY staff were welcomed to participate independently, a CY leader such as an IM or an experienced ACM would typically agree to join the study first. We

encouraged those initial participants to reshare our invitation with others, which helped expand our participant group.

A total of 33 ACMs and IMs participated in interviews or focus groups, and four more ACMs agreed to be shadowed for observations during one school day. Teachers who worked with ACMs at each site were also invited to participate, but conditions during the late COVID period may help explain why none responded to interview requests. We did not interview students for this study. Thus, the absence of teacher and student perspectives on the roles of CY staff are a limitation of this research.

Data Collection

Two in-person focus groups (50–60 minutes), and four virtual individual interviews (30–60 minutes) were conducted in spring 2022. We used a semi-structured protocol for all, which allowed for probing responses and cross-participant discussion (during focus groups). Interviews and focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed by all members of the research team. We also conducted in-person site visits at four schools. We used a structured protocol and took detailed field notes while observing six ACMs' interactions with students before, during, and after school.

Data Analysis

We organized and coded data through three phases of qualitative analysis, as interviews, focus groups, and observations occurred. Broad themes were identified based on initial codes, which were refined as we deepened our analysis. Each researcher individually documented emerging themes which were supported by direct quotes from interview and focus group transcripts, and verbatim quotes written down in observation notes. We then compiled each of our individual notes to create shared analytic memos, where we collaboratively documented our thinking about the data. These memos bolstered our analysis by capturing dialogues between researchers, highlighting points of alignment, and providing additional supporting examples and contextual information. This iterative process helped us see how the different data sources related to one another, and organize the findings, to build in-depth understandings of CY staff's experiences, explore the role of relationships and trust in providing student support, and gain insights about the impact of ACMs' daily work on students' academic and social-emotional development. Data were triangulated by analyzing the consistency of the findings across data collection methods, conducting member checks with CY staff that participated in the study, and regularly consulting with CY leadership

throughout the process of data collection, analysis, and presentation. For example, we synthesized our analytic memos to create summaries of our preliminary findings, which we shared with CY leadership for feedback before drafting the results. We then wrote a research report for CY and provided an organization-wide presentation of findings, which were discussed before we moved this work into scholarly publication (Herelle et al., 2023).

Researcher Positionality

We recognize that our unique identities, theoretical perspectives, and professional backgrounds inevitably contribute to all aspects of this study. One author self identifies as an African American woman, another author self identifies as a White woman, and the other as an Asian-American and White woman. Collectively, we have academic backgrounds spanning education, political science, psychology, and school counseling, which informs our theoretical lenses. We also bring a breadth of experience working in elementary, secondary, higher education, and nonprofit contexts in leadership, teaching, advising, and other equity-focused student support roles. We also had a previous working relationship with CY, which supported our access to participants and sites. While we had prior experience working in some regions of focus, we valued and depended on the expertise of CY staff and teachers at each site in building understandings of local school, community, and sociopolitical contexts.

Findings

Participants' interactions with youth showed how trust-building often happens through shared social experiences and everyday connections. As CY staff disclosed individual accounts of their service year experiences, they often reflected on the temporal role of their position and considered how they were able to build relationships with students despite knowing them for short periods of time. The findings suggest that CY staff across sites and grade levels develop trust with students using strategies grounded in a human-centered approach.

CY staff perceptions of the strength of their relationships with students varied. ACMs who provided social-emotional support formally through academic lesson plans and informally during in-the-moment social interactions described their relationships with students as "important" and "valuable." Some ACMs who spent less time engaging in social-emotional and relationship-building activities perceived their relationships with students as having less of an impact on social-emotional development and success. CY staff

identified constraints that hindered relationship-building, including lack of time, pressure to meet academic objectives, and fear that students would fall behind if they spent too much time on social-emotional learning. Despite these challenges, ACMs and IMs agreed having "a people first students second" mindset, being vulnerable and honest with students, and setting "warm-strict" boundaries were essential strategies to build trust with students.

"People First, Students Second": A Holistic Approach

When asked how they build trust with students, many participants described strategies that one ACM summarized as treating students as "people first, students second." IMs and ACMs emphasized that adolescents' lives are complex and multidimensional, and to support students effectively, adults must be aware of the multiple terrains students navigate, including family, friends, school, community, and self-discovery. Participants described a "people first, students second" approach as intentionally connecting with students on a human level as well as focusing on their academic progress. Although ACMs and IMs noted all students benefit from a trusting relationship, they noticed certain groups were particularly aided through a "people first, students second" approach. They believed trust was particularly important for neurodivergent students, multilingual learners, and LGBTQ+ youth to thrive in school. CY staff observed that, whether due to learning and language differences, developing social skills, or facing exclusion, these students often struggled with establishing a sense of belonging and school connectedness and were positively impacted through a "people first, students second approach."

ACMs also used other strategies to cultivate relationships, such as opening conversations by asking about students' emotional, physical, and mental well-being, family, and friends before moving into lesson content, and showing students respect by encouraging their autonomy. One ACM explained, "We see them as more than just students." This was evidenced on several occasions during the site visits when ACMs were observed checking in with students by asking about their weekend, family, and overall well-being. One ACM described how they always initiated conversations by centering the child as a person:

> For example, on Monday, the first time I see them, the first question I always ask them is, "How was your weekend? How's the family? How's your siblings?" So, the next time I talk to them, I will say, "Oh, you said you were going to a party with your family, how was it?" And they will say, "Oh wow

you remembered." It makes it easier to drop down the walls so when you need to talk to them about academics it makes it easier.

An IM emphasized how they remind ACMs to be intentional and consistent in getting to know students. IMs and ACMs explained they ask questions about students' lives outside of school, play games so students can feel comfortable being themselves, and try to identify common interests (e.g., TikTok, dancing, basketball, watching anime, reading comics) to create an environment where students feel safe to be authentic. Further, ACMs emphasized building students' agency as critical to maintaining a "people first" approach. An ACM explained:

> Another strategy I have been using is if they are not having a good time, they let me know if they want to take a walk to give them some autonomy. When we are on a walk, I don't ask them anything school-related. I ask them how they are doing as a person. That is the first thing.

A different ACM asserted, "Respect that they know what they want, and know what they need, and if they don't, they will show you in some way." Another described giving students options to promote their agency:

> If I had a student that didn't want to work on something, I would say, "If you are tired right now, you can sit this one out, you can draw a picture, you can come in during lunch, you can work on it on your own, with a partner, or we can work on it together. It gave them a little bit of power over the situation and some trust in me, because it showed that I valued their opinion, and I value that, "You know what's right for you, so let's figure out what's right for you."

Overall, in maintaining a "people first, students second" approach, ACMs identified two essential strategies: getting to know the whole individual beyond their role as a student, and promoting student agency. A "people first, students second" approach is the framework guiding the following strategies, and necessary to build trust and support students' social-emotional development and academic growth.

Developing Trust Through Vulnerability, Validation, and Authenticity

Participants explained trust-building as happening during daily interactions with students in the classroom, at lunch and recess, after school, and while supporting them through a social or academic struggle. Daily interactions

provided ACMs and students opportunities to honestly and openly express emotions, thoughts, and frustrations that arose throughout the day. ACMs and IMs described vulnerability, validation, and authenticity as essential to building trust.

Highlighting the importance of being vulnerable and relatable with students, on ACM retold an instance when she walked into class and overheard students talking about their parents. A generally reserved and quiet student expressed that his father passed away when he was a young child. The ACM, who also lost her father at an early age, noticed the student appeared sad at the end of class. She approached him and shared that her dad also passed away when she was younger, and she told him she was available if he ever needed to talk. The ACM explained the student eventually spoke to her about his father and other situations. She reflected,

> Ever since then, whenever he has a problem, he will talk to me. With COVID, when the kids had to get vaccinated or they wouldn't be able to go to school, he was really worried about that because his mom wasn't going to let him get vaccinated, and he was so sad that he wasn't going to see his friends. But we had lunch together and we talked about it. Vulnerability and relatability is key.

This interaction highlights the importance of being honest and relatable with students while meeting them where they are in-the-moment.

ACMs described vulnerability as intertwined with honesty and authenticity. They shared that students were more likely to be their authentic selves when ACMs were also genuine. They described how youth wanted adults to be "honest with them and not sugar coat" anything. One ACM stated, "The biggest thing I learned is, kids just want you to be real with them. They don't want you to sugar coat it and paint this nice picture." When asked to describe strategies that build trust, another ACM said, "I think getting to know them, being consistent and being honest is a good strategy." Another ACM gave an example of engaging honestly with students about academic progress when a student was upset that they were always placed in the front of the classroom, and asked the ACM for an explanation. The ACM recounted her response:

> All right, do you want to know the truth? You went from an *F* in Q1 to a B+ in Q2. Guess what happened between Q1 and Q2? They put you in the front. If you don't want to get an *F* again, you need to stay in the front.

Beyond engaging honestly about students' academic progress, ACMs also pointed out how being "real" with students created opportunities for students to bring their whole selves to school. An ACM explained how she creates

opportunities for students "to be seen" holistically, such as looking for commonalities and playing games that engage their personalities. She described how interactive board games allowed her to see students beyond academics and as a "whole human being." She stated, "I think they really want to be seen like, 'I'm really a human being, I'm really a whole person.'"

An example from another ACM emphasized the importance of validating students' feelings and personal vulnerability. The AMC described a moment when she was pulled from another classroom to help a teacher with one student whom the teacher observed would benefit from one-on-one support. She recalled,

> . . .We were doing flashcards, adding and subtracting integers. They were really good at the negatives, but when the negatives and positives were combined, they were having a really hard time. I flipped one and the next thing I knew, the student was crying and calling themselves stupid.

She reiterated her lack of knowledge about this student's specific social-emotional or academic needs and explained the importance of building a "culture of mistakes" where everyone, including herself, can feel safe to make mistakes without judgment or fear. She continued,

> I said, "Let's take some deep breaths," and said some reassuring things: "This is not the end, this is hard, you are not the first person to feel this way, and you won't be the last. . ." I just gave them time to grieve. I gave them options: go back to class and sit there, keep going and trying, we can go to the counselor, or we can just talk and get more feelings out. I shared I cry sometimes when math is hard—again, that vulnerability. Vulnerability mixed with having options.

The ACM identified three important elements during this brief interaction that contributed to building a trusting relationship: She validated the student's feelings of frustration, acknowledged that she also feels disheartened when encountering challenges, and gave the student options.

Similarly, another ACM was observed demonstrating authenticity and honesty when sharing her own third grade experience of being suspended when supporting an elementary student who had recently returned to school after suspension. The AMC pulled the student aside into a CY staff room, patted him on the back, looked into his eyes, and said,

> You're going to get through this. Did you know that I got suspended? But I got through it, and I went to college, and now I'm going to become a doctor,

and nobody even knows or cares about my third-grade suspension. It's going to be ok.

Then the AMC gave the student a hug before sending him to his first class of the day. Although ACMs showed compassion and authenticity, they also shared the importance of boundaries.

Trust and Boundaries

Participants noted boundaries were essential to building trusting relationships with students. "Even if it seems like opposites," an ACM explained, "both vulnerability and boundaries are necessary." There was widespread agreement among CY staff that boundaries needed to be clear and consistent. One ACM noted a clear difference between being friends and being friendly with students, explaining, "You need to be able to have boundaries with the students and be clear about what's ok and what's not. The goal is to be warmstrict, but I know that is a high bar to achieve." Difficulty in establishing and maintaining boundaries was common, as students often sought to understand their boundaries by testing their limits. Participants' strategies to establish and maintain boundaries were rooted in a human-centered approach built on mutual respect.

During site visits, ACMs were observed establishing physical, language, and social boundaries by reminding students of expectations regarding personal space with adults and peers, to refrain from using expletives, and conversations that are off limits. An IM pointed out how boundaries foster respect between students and CY staff and help keep the focus on students' academic and social-emotional development. She explained the importance of helping students understand that even though CY staff guide students through some of their problems, give them choices, and help them with their decision-making, there are certain situations when students need to talk with someone other than CY staff. As the IM put it, ACMs need to help students learn "what moments you should come to a CY and which moments you shouldn't come to a CY." She added, "Maybe some conversation should be had with a friend. I have learned to be clear on the spaces I can help with and which spaces I can't." Setting such boundaries with students is critical for CY staff's work in schools.

In addition to setting boundaries, participants discussed the importance of respecting students' boundaries. An ACM described a situation where a student, whom he knew was experiencing hardships at home, became visibly upset during class. He approached the student and asked if he needed to take a break and go for a short walk. The ACM explained he didn't push him to

talk during that time. They walked for a while and eventually the student began to discuss some of his concerns. He described part of the process of building trust with students as "respecting when they need time and space and giving it to them."

Discussion

The voices of participants in this study provide interpersonal strategies for teachers, teaching assistants, counselors, and mentors to consider when building holistic and authentic relationships with students. The findings also offer insights for education leaders seeking to support students' social-emotional learning and academic development. Although long-term trust building between teachers and students is often studied, strategies for building trust between short term staff members and students are often overlooked. Despite the temporality of their position, CY staff were able to build trust with students by placing importance on social-emotional development as a precursor to academic achievement. They believed that prioritizing a strong foundation of social-emotional support—preceding, during, and following academic support—was essential to cultivating a learning environment that would enable students to thrive. Similarly, Cornelius-White (2007) and Donlan et al. (2017) found considerable positive correlations between "person-centered" and "learner-centered" strategies such as empathy, warmth, genuineness, and student academic outcomes. The findings exemplify interactive and relational strategies that foster trusting relationships through shared social experiences and everyday interactions with students and illustrate relational skill-building as essential to students' thriving at school. This study provides insights for short term workers and school leaders navigating high teacher and staff turnover rates and underscores strategies for all adults in schools to build trusting relationships with students.

ACMs drew on a breadth of strategies to build trust and offer guidance, while grounding their approach in a philosophy of respecting students' holistic identities within and beyond the school context. Aligned with studies that show how expressing shared interests or similarities strengthen relational bonds with students (Donlan et al., 2017; Gehlbach et al., 2016; Mawhinney & Sagan, 2007), findings from this study illustrate how CY staff demonstrated vulnerability and relatability with students by being authentic about their individual challenges and building relationships through identifying common interests. Similarly, underscoring the power of personal relationships between teachers and students, Mawhinney and Sagan (2007) note that active listening, demonstrating care and concern about what is going on in students' lives, and "knowing your students and allowing them to know you"

contribute to building trusting relationships with students (p. 461). CY staff cultivated trusting relationships by sharing power, ensuring student agency, and respecting and trusting students' abilities to make the choices that were best for themselves. Likewise, Russell (2018) noted relationship-building starts with fostering agency by giving students a voice and the freedom to make choices in the classroom.

Findings demonstrate boundaries as essential to building trusting relationships with students. In a study examining boundary work within the context of interpersonal relationships, Trefalt (2013) explains setting boundaries within caring and collaborative relationships has positive relational outcomes. Although CY staff described establishing boundaries with students as "challenging', findings show establishing and maintaining clear and consistent boundaries rooted in a human-centered approach builds mutual respect and cultivates trusting relationships.

While all students equally benefit from healthy trusting relationships, findings suggest trusting relationships did not benefit all students equally. CY staff observed that students who had additional barriers to establishing a sense of belonging at school, such as students who self-identify as LBGTQIA, racially and ethnically marginalized students, neurodivergent students, and multilingual learners notably benefited from trusting relationships with adults in schools. This finding aligns with other studies noting the increased importance of trusting relationships in school contexts for ethnically and racially diverse students (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009; Lawrence et al., 2019), neurodivergent youth (Kimber et al., 2021), and students experiencing mental health challenges (Hertz et al., 2021). Research shows how relationships between adults and students in schools can promote student engagement and retention and positive educational and developmental outcomes, including psychosocial health and wellbeing, prosocial behavior, and academic achievement (Allen et al., 2021). Trusting relationships are especially critical for students who experience. Studies show fostering trusting relationships with students contributes to helping them feel welcomed, safe, and supported and can lead to positive student outcomes (Eckels, 2023).

Conclusion

This study examines how young adults serving in student support roles in two urban districts developed trusting relationships with youth and how they perceived their contribution to students' academic and social-emotional growth. Findings highlight three key strategies CY near-peer adult student success coaches used to develop trusting relationships with students. CY staff engaged in human-centered approaches, practiced authenticity, and maintained clear

relationship boundaries to support building trusting and holistic relationships with students. These findings also shed light on the strengths and contributions of short-term school staff who often have limited time to cultivate relationships in comparison to other educators who are typically centered in the TSR literature. ACMs and IMs implemented impactful trust-building strategies that mirror those seen in successful TSRs, underscoring how adults serving in student support roles can contribute to student development and the school community, through relatively brief interactions addressing students' needs. As this study did not include teacher and student interviews, it is important to consider their perspectives in future research about short-term staff members' relationships with students.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

Funding

ORCID iDs

Tarsha I. Herelle https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0497-3830
Martha Abele Mac Iver https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1941-8517
Mariko Yoshisato Cavey https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4384-2078

References

Allen, K. A., Slaten, C. D., Arslan, G., Roffey, S., Craig, H., & Vella-Brodrick, D. A. (2021). School belonging: The Importance of student and teacher relationships. In M. L. Kern & M. L. Wehmeyer (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of positive education*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-64537-3_21

Allensworth, E., & Easton, J. (2007). *What matters for staying on-track and graduating in Chicago public high schools*. Consortium on Chicago School Research.

Anderman, L., & Leake, V. (2005). The ABCs of motivation: An alternative framework for teaching pre-service teachers about motivation. *The Clearing House*, *78*, 192–196.

Anderson, J. R. (2019). *The effects of a school-based mentoring program on adolescent well being: A dual-factor model perspective* [ProQuest Dissertations & Theses].

Balfanz, R., & Byrnes, V. (2020). *Connecting social-emotional development, academic achievement, and on-track outcomes: A multi-district study of grades*

3 to 10 students supported by City Year Americorps members. The Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University.

Balfanz, R., & Byrnes, V. (2021). *Connecting social-emotional development and academic indicators across multiple years*. The Everyone Graduates Center at the Johns Hopkins University School of Education.

Balfanz, R., & Whitehurst, (2019). An integrated approach fosters student success. In *Should schools embrace social and emotional learning? Debating the merits and costs. Education Next* (pp. 68–74). https://web.s.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/ pdfviewer?vid=2&sid=0d69a6ed-751a-4806-b94b-d56b8548a45d%40redis

Balfanz, R., & Byrnes, V. (2021). *Connecting social and emotional indicators and academic development across multiple years*. The Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University.

Bidwell, C. E. (2001). Analyzing schools as organizations: Long-term permanence and short-term change. *Sociology of Education*, *74*, 100–114. https://doi. org/10.2307/2673256

Brake, A. (2020). Right from the start: Critical classroom practices for building teacher–student trust in the first 10 weeks of ninth grade. *The Urban Review*, *52*(2), 277–298. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-019-00528-z

Bryk, A., & Schneider, B. (2002). *Trust in schools: A core resource for improvement*. Russell Sage Foundation.

Bryson, C. J. (2022). *Delaying college for domestic civic service: The gap year experiences of City Year AmeriCorps alumni* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Arkansas].

Catalano, R. F., Berglund, M. L., Ryan, J. A., Lonczak, H. S., & Hawkins, J. D. (2004). Positive youth development in the United States: Research findings on evaluations of positive youth development programs. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, *591*(1), 98–124.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2009). *School connectedness: Strategies for increasing protective factors among youth*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Center for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022, March 21). New CDC data illuminate youth mental health threats during the COVID-19 pandemic. https://www. cdc.gov/media/releases/2022/p0331-youth-mental-health-covid-19.html

Claro, A., & Perelmiter, T. (2022). The effects of mentoring programs on emotional well-being in youth: A meta-analysis. *Contemporary School Psychology*, *26*(4), 545–557. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40688-021-00377-2

Coleman, J. S. (1988). Social capital in the creation of human capital. *American Journal of Sociology*, *94*, S95–S120.

Cornelius-White, J. (2007). Learner-centered teacher-student relationships are effective: A meta analysis. *Review of Educational Research*, *77*(1), 113–143. https:// doi.org/10.3102/003465430298563

Corrin, W., Sepanik, S., Rosen, R., & Shane, A. (2016). *Addressing early warning indicators: Interim impact findings from the investing in innovation (i3) evaluation of diplomas now*. MDRC.

Demerath, P., Kemper, S., Yousuf, E., & Banwo, B. (2022). A grounded model of how educators earn students' trust in a high performing U.S. urban high school. *The Urban Review*, *54*(5), 703–732. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-022-00635-4

Donlan, A. E., McDermott, E. R., & Zaff, J. F. (2017). Building relationships between mentors and youth: Development of the TRICS model. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *79*, 385–398. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2017.06.04

DuBois, D. L., Holloway, B. E., Valentine, J. C., & Cooper, H. (2002). Effectiveness of mentoring programs for youth: A meta-analytic review. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *30*(2), 157–197. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1014628810714

DuBois, D. L., Portillo, N., Rhodes, J. E., Silverthorn, N., & Valentine, J. C. (2011). How effective are mentoring programs for youth? A systematic assessment of the evidence. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, *12*(2), 57–91. https://doi.org/10.1177/1529100611414806

Eckels, J. (2023). Why building trust in schools matters. https://www.cityyear.org/national/stories/education/why-building-trust-in-schools-matters/

Fehérvári, A., & Varga, A. (2023). Mentoring as prevention of early school leaving: A qualitative systematic literature review. In *Frontiers in education* (Vol. 8, p. 1156725).

Fredricks, J. A., Parr, A. K., Amemiya, J. L., Wang, M. T., & Brauer, S. (2019). What matters for urban adolescents' engagement and disengagement in school: A mixed-methods study. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, *34*(5), 491–527. https://doi.org/10.1177/0743558419830638

Gehlbach, H., Brinkworth, M. E., King, A. M., Hsu, L. M., McIntyre, J., & Rogers, T. (2016). Creating birds of similar feathers: Leveraging similarity to improve teacher–student relationships and academic achievement. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *108*(3), 342. https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000042

Gregory, A., & Ripski, M. B. (2008). Adolescent trust in teachers: Implications for behavior in the high school classroom. *School Psychology Review*, *37*(3), 337–353. https://doi.org/10.1080/02796015.2008.12087881

Gordon, J., Downey, J., & Bangert, A. (2013). Effects of a school-based mentoring program on school behavior and measures of adolescent connectedness. *The School Community Journal*, *23*(2), 227.

Hajovsky, D. B., Chesnut, S. R., & Jensen, K. M. (2020). The role of teachers' self-efficacy beliefs in the development of teacher-student relationships. *Journal of School Psychology*, *82*, 141–158. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2020.09.001

Hart, M. J., Flitner, A. M., Kornbluh, M. E., Thompson, D. C., Davis, A. L., Lanza-Gregory, J., & Strait, G. G. (2024). Combining MTSS and community-based mentoring programs. *School Psychology Review*, *53*(2), 185–199. https://doi.org/10.1080/2372966X.2021.1922937

Herelle, T. I., Yoshisato, M., Byrnes, V., Mc Iver, M. A., & Balfanz, R. (2023). *The dynamics of City Year interactions with students and how they contribute to social-emotional learning and student outcomes*. The Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University.

Hertz, M. F., Kilmer, G., Verlenden, J., Liddon, N., Rasberry, C. N., Barrios, L. C., & Ethier, K. A. (2021). Adolescent mental health, connectedness, and mode of school instruction during COVID-19. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, *70*(1), 57–63. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2021.10.021

Huh, M. K., Fitzpatrick, K., Harris, C., & Niño, M. (2022). Social and psychological resources and COVID-19 related fear, threat and worry. *Anxiety, Stress, & Coping*, *36*(6), 710–726. https://doi.org/10.1080/10615806.2022.2149743

Johnston, O., Wildy, H., & Shand, J. (2019). A decade of teacher expectations research 2008–2018: Historical foundations, new developments, and future pathways. *Australian Journal of Education*, *63*(1), 44–73. https://doi.org/10.1177/0004944118824420

Kamrath, B., & Bradford, K. R. (2020). A case study of teacher turnover and retention in an urban elementary school. *Educational Considerations*, *45*(3), 1–18. https://doi.org/10.4148/0146-9282.2181

Kimber, A., Burns, J., & Murphy, M. (2021). "It's all about knowing the young person": Best practice in coaching autistic athletes. *Sports Coaching Review*, *12*(2), 166–186. https://doi.org/10.1080/21640629.2021.1944527

Kraft, M. A., Bolves, A. J., & Hurd, N. M. (2023). *How informal mentoring by teachers, counselors, and coaches supports students' long-run academic success/ Matthew A. Kraft, Alexander J. Bolves, Noelle M. Hurd*. National Bureau of Economic Research.

La Guardia, J. G., & Ryan, R.M. (2002). *What adolescents need: A self-determination theory perspective on development within families, school, and society*. In F. Pajares & T. Urdan (Eds.), Academic motivation of adolescents (pp. 193–219). Greenwich, CT: Information Age.

Lawrence, D., Dawson, V., Houghton, S., Goodsell, B., & Sawyer, M. G. (2019). Impact of mental disorders on attendance at school. *Australian Journal of Education*, *63*(1), 5–21. https://doi.org/10.1177/0004944118823576

Lee, S. J. (2007). The relations between the student–teacher trust relationship and school success in the case of Korean middle schools. *Educational Studies*, *33*(2), 209–216. https://doi.org/10.1080/03055690601068477

Libbey, H. P. (2004). Measuring student relationships to school: Attachment, bonding, connectedness, and engagement. *The Journal of School Health*, *74*(7), 274–283. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1746-1561.2004.tb08284.x

Martin, A. J., Marsh, H. W., McInerney, D. M., Green, J., & Dowson, M. (2007). Getting along with teachers and parents: The yields of good relationships for students' achievement motivation and self-esteem. *Australian Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, *17*(2), 109–125. https://doi.org/10.1375/ajgc.17.2.109

Mawhinney, T. S., & Sagan, L. L. (2007). The power of personal relationships. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *88*(6), 460–464. https://doi.org/10.1177/003172170708800611

Miranda-Chan, T., Fruiht, V., Dubon, V., & Wray-Lake, L. (2016). The functions and longitudinal outcomes of adolescents' naturally occurring mentorships. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *57*(1-2), 47–59.

Murray, C. (2009). Parent and teacher relationships as predictors of school engagement and functioning among low-income urban youth. *The Journal of Early Adolescence*, *29*(3), 376–404. https://doi.org/10.1177/0272431608322940

Norton, M. H. (2013). *Year four evaluation of city year greater Philadelphia*. Research for Action.

Pendergast, L. L., & Kaplan, A. (2015). Instructional context and student motivation, learning, and development: Commentary and implications for school psychologists. *School Psychology International*, *36*(6), 638–647. https://doi.org/10.1177/0143034315613560

Pianta, R. C. (1999). *Enhancing relationships between children and teachers*. American Psychological Association

Pianta, R. C., Hamre, B., & Stuhlman, M. (2003). Relationships between teachers and children. In W. M. Reynolds, G. E. Miller, & I. B. Weiner (Eds.), *Handbook of psychology: Educational psychology* (Vol. 7, pp. 199–234). John Wiley.

Pittman, K., Moroney, D. A., Irby, M., & Young, J. (2020). Unusual suspects: The people inside and outside of school who matter in whole school, whole community, whole child efforts. *The Journal of School Health*, *90*(12), 1038–1044. https://doi.org/10.1111/josh.12966

Platz, M. (2021). Trust between teacher and student in academic education at school. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, *55*(4–5), 688–697. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9752.12560

Poling, D. V., Van Loan, C. L., Garwood, J. D., Zhang, S., & Riddle, D. (2022). Enhancing teacher-student relationship quality: A narrative review of school-based interventions. *Educational Research Review*, *37*, 100459. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2022.100459

Quin, D. (2017). Longitudinal and contextual associations between teacher-student relationships and student engagement: A systematic review. *Review of Educational Research*, *87*(2), 345–387. https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654316669434

Raposa, E. B., Rhodes, J., Stams, G. J. J., Card, N., Burton, S., Schwartz, S., & Hussain, S. (2019). The effects of youth mentoring programs: A meta-analysis of outcome studies. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *48*, 423–443. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-019-00982-8

Rhodes, J. E. (2005). A model of youth mentoring. In D. L. DuBois & M. J. Karche (Eds.), *Handbook of youth mentoring*. SAGE Publications.

Rhodes, J. E., & DuBois, D. L. (2006). *Understanding and facilitating the youth mentoring movement. social policy report*. Volume 20, Number 3. Society for Research in Child Development.

Reeve, J., & Cheon, S. H. (2021). Autonomy-supportive teaching: Its malleability, benefits, and potential to improve educational practice. *Educational Psychologist*, *56*(1), 54–77. https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2020.1862657

Romero, L. (2010). *Student trust: Impacting high school outcomes*. University of California, Riverside.

Roorda, D. L., Koomen, H. M., Spilt, J. L., & Oort, F. J. (2011). The influence of affective teacher–student relationships on students' school engagement and

achievement: A meta-analytic approach. *Review of Educational Research*, *81*(4), 493–529. https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654311421793

Russell, M. (2018). Teachers empowering students by building relationships and fostering agency. *California English*, *23*(4), 6–9.

Russell, S. L., Wentzel, K. R., & Donlan, A. E. (2016). Teachers' beliefs about the development of teacher–adolescent trust. *Learning Environments Research*, *19*, 241–266. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10984-016-9207-8

Ruzek, E. A., Hafen, C. A., Allen, J. P., Gregory, A., Mikami, A. Y., & Pianta, R. C. (2016). How teacher emotional support motivates students: The mediating roles of perceived peer relatedness, autonomy support, and competence. *Learning and Instruction*, *42*, 95–103. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2016.01.004

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2020). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation from a self-determination theory perspective: Definitions, theory, practices, and future directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, *61*, 101860. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2020.101860

Scales, P. C., Van Boekel, M., Pekel, K., Syvertsen, A. K., & Roehlkepartain, E. C. (2020). Effects of developmental relationships with teachers on middle-school students' motivation and performance. *Psychology in the Schools*, *57*(4), 646–677. https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22350

Schneider, B., Judy, J., Mazuca Ebmeyer, C., & Broda, M. (2014). Trust in elementary and secondary urban schools: A pathway for student success and college ambition. In P. B. Forsyth, M. Van Houtte, & D. Van Maele, (Eds.), *Trust and school life: The role of trust for learning, teaching, leading, and bridging* (pp. 37–56). Springer.

Spilt, J. L., Koomen, H. M., Thijs, J. T., & Van der Leij, A. (2012). Supporting teachers' relationships with disruptive children: The potential of relationship-focused reflection. *Attachment & Human Development*, *14*(3), 305–318. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616734.2012.672286

Trefalt, Š. (2013). Between you and me: Setting work-nonwork boundaries in the context of workplace relationships. *Academy of Management Journal*, *56*(6), 1802–1829. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2011.0298

Tschannen-Moran, M., & Hoy, W. K. (2000). A multidisciplinary analysis of the nature, meaning, and measurement of trust. *Review of Educational Research*, *70*(4), 547–593. https://doi.org/10.2307/1170781

Tschannen-Moran, M. (2001). Collaboration and the need for trust. *Journal of Educational Administration*, *39*(4), 308–331.

Varga, S. M., Yu, M. V. B., Johnson, H. E., Futch Ehrlich, V., & Deutsch, N. L. (2023). "It's going to help me in life": Forms, sources, and functions of social support for youth in natural mentoring relationships. *Journal of Community Psychology*, *51*(8), 3289–3308. https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.23045

Wentzel, K. R. (2009). Students' relationships with teachers as motivational contexts. In K. R. Wenzel & A. Wigfield (Eds.), *Handbook of motivation at school* (pp. 301–322). Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.

Wentzel, K. R., Russell, S., & Baker, S. (2016). Emotional support and expectations from parents, teachers, and peers predict adolescent competence at school. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *108*(2), 242–255. https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000049

Wheeler, M. E., Keller, T. E., & DuBois, D. L. (2010). Review of three recent randomized trials of school-based mentoring and commentaries: Making sense of mixed findings. *Social policy Report/Society for Research in Child Development*, *24*(3), 1–27. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2379-3988.2010.tb00064.x

Wigfield, A., & Tonks, S. (2002). Adolescents' expectations for success and achievement task values during the middle and high school years. In F. Pajares & T. Urdan (Eds.), *Academic motivation of adolescents* (pp. 53–82). Information Age.

Witt, P. L., Wheeless, L. R., & Allen, M. (2004). A meta-analytical review of the relationship between teacher immediacy and student learning. *Communication Monographs*, *71*(2), 184–207. https://doi.org/10.1080/036452042000228054

Wormeli, R. (2018). *Fair isn't always equal: Assessing and grading in the differentiated classroom*. Stenhouse Publishers.

Author Biographies

Tarsha I. Herelle is an Assistant Research Scientist with the Center for Social Organization of Schools in the School of Education at Johns Hopkins University. Her scholarship broadly examines notions of belonging and equity and access issues for marginalized groups with a focus on how educational organizations and policies shape individual behaviors and experiences.

Martha Abele Mac Iver is an Associate Research Professor in the School of Education at Johns Hopkins University and is affiliated with the Center for Social Organization of Schools. Her research explores how to improve educational outcomes for historically underserved students.

Mariko Yoshisato Cavey is an Assistant Professor of Practice in the Department of Educational Foundations, Organizations, and Policy at the University of Pittsburgh School of Education. Her work focuses broadly on community engagement and scholarship, and supports university-school-community partnerships for equity in education research, policy, and practice.