PLANNING FOR STUDENT SUCCESS DURING DISRUPTION

A Relationship-based Strategy for Supporting Each Student

AUGUST 6, 2020

Overview

As schools develop their plans for reopening in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis, it is clear that a one-size-fits-all approach won't work for students. School leaders will need to design their school plans to address the myriad effects of the pandemic on children and youth: interrupted learning; isolation from teachers and friends; family, health. and economic impacts; and uncertainty about the structure of the upcoming school year. The adverse impact of school closures has been the greatest for students of color, low-income students, English learners, and students with disabilities. Many students and families felt disoriented and disconnected as schools wrapped up in the spring, and there continue to be many unknowns about the format of schools over the next year.
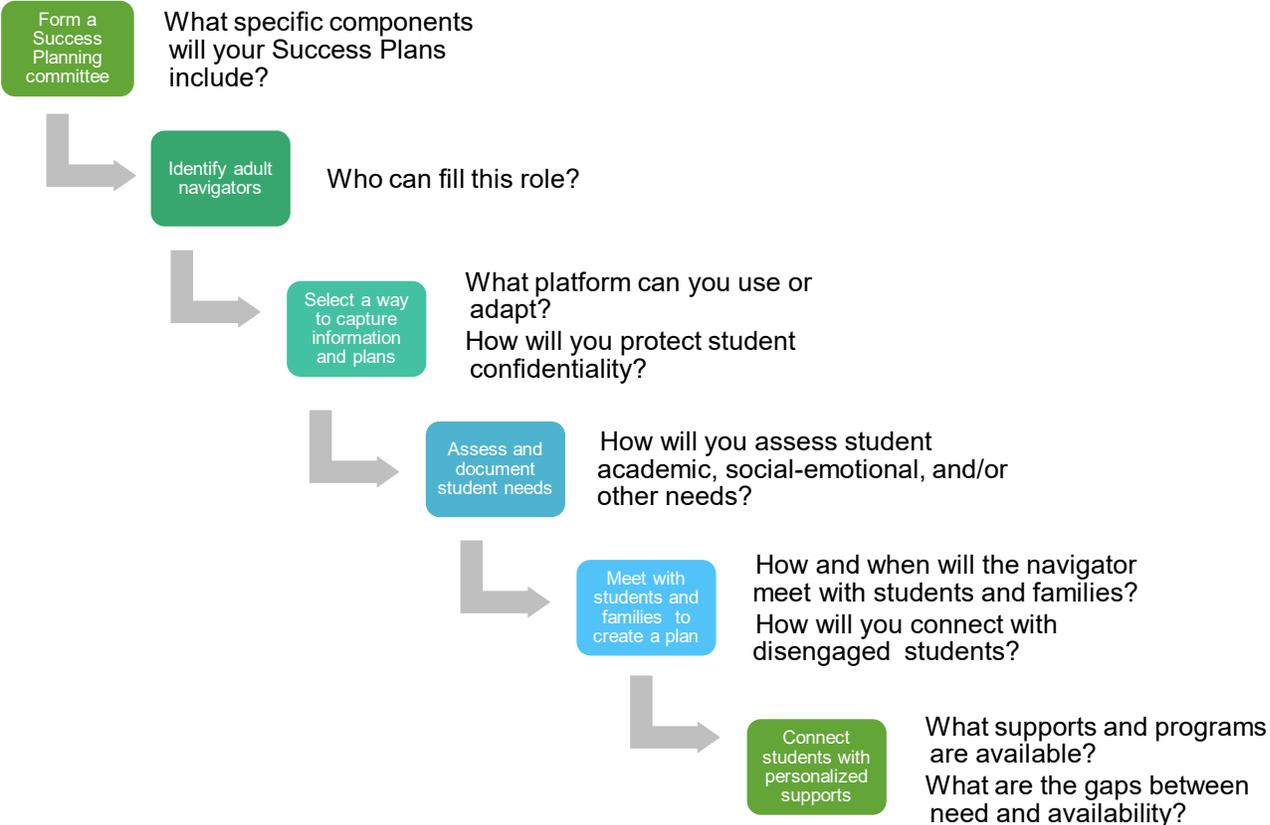
Schools can meet these challenges by developing individual plans to support each student through a sustained, supportive relationship with an educator. That educator/navigator meets regularly with the student and family to develop specific plans for students to succeed and thrive through this disruption. Research from Turnaround for Children and others has already shown the importance of relationships for learning. In the midst of unprecedented disruption, relationships are more essential than ever. Each student is unique and needs planned attention to her assets and challenges. We also know that children need more than a strong academic program to succeed. Multiple organizations and reports, including the Rennie Center's *Back to School Blueprint* and the *Imagining September* report from researchers at MIT and the Harvard Graduate School of Education, have prioritized relationships and comprehensive supports in their proposals.

Others, such as the Big Picture Learning network, City Connects, and Communities In Schools already have personalized support structures that enable them to identify and meet individual students' needs during the current turbulence. Most schools, though, do not currently use these strategies, and many students are at risk of falling behind even farther this year through disconnection, loss of special education or language supports, lack of early intervention, and/or mental health and other challenges.

In *Getting Kids Back on Track*, published in June 2020, we laid out a Success Planning framework for districts and schools to develop a relationship-driven approach to navigating the uncertainty and upheaval of schooling during the pandemic. Success Planning is a flexible process, facilitated by an adult navigator who will get to know students individually and act as a guide to develop a plan for success and support. The navigator will connect students with the necessary academic, social-emotional, and other supports to get back on track. Importantly, the relationships at the core of Success Planning can be sustained regardless of which learning modality districts use, including distance, hybrid, and in person—and can provide crucial stability if that format changes through the school year.

In this guide, we offer strategies for implementing Success Planning aligned with the six action steps outlined in our earlier piece. While some action steps will ideally occur sequentially, others will overlap with each other and happen simultaneously. We focus here on those action steps that can be readily integrated into school reopening efforts in the short term. Subsequent editions will address additional steps.

Success Planning Action Steps for School Leaders

Form a Success Planning committee	What specific components will your Success Plans include?
Identify adult navigators	Who can fill this role?
Select a way to capture information and plans	What platform can you use or adapt? How will you protect student confidentiality?
Assess and document student needs	How will you assess student academic, social-emotional, and/or other needs?
Meet with students and families to create a plan	How and when will the navigator meet with students and families? How will you connect with disengaged students?
Connect students with personalized supports	What supports and programs are available? What are the gaps between need and availability?

Guiding students' interest-based, real-world learning through advisories: Big Picture Learning

"'It's more than just homeroom. You really create a space where kids feel known and that they're loved,'" according to a Big Picture Learning (BPL) network leader.[1] Through this space—which is referred to as advisory—students in BPL-affiliated schools explore their interests and passions and build close connections with their teachers and peers. Based in Providence, Rhode Island, BPL has developed a network of approximately 26 high schools in the United States and assists more than 100 schools internationally. Most BPL-affiliated schools are district public schools, which include many alternative schools; the network also contains private and charter schools. BPL is committed to expanding equitable opportunities for youth from marginalized communities. A majority of students enrolled at BPL-affiliated schools are students of color and low-income students; 21% access special education services.[2] In addition to advisory, BPL's other core features (which are collectively called the 10 distinguishers) include one student at a time; learning through interests and internships; parent and family engagement; school culture; authentic assessment; school organization; leadership; post-secondary planning; and professional development.[3]

Teachers at BPL-affiliated schools serve as advisors who meet with the same group of 15 students over the course of four years. Advisories bring students together in circles to discuss current events and any social or personal issue that they may want to share. This structure also enables students to work independently on interest-based learning projects, supported by their advisor. Advisors provide individualized instruction and whole-group and small-group instruction as needed. Student learning is intentionally linked with real-world experiences in which students participate in internships. BPL created the ImBlaze online platform, which is used to manage the internship experience (we will examine ImBlaze in greater detail in a future edition of this guide). In collaboration with their advisors, mentors (who support students' internship experiences), and families, students develop individualized learning plans to document their progress. These plans include academic work and progress, student exhibitions, information about internships and other experiential learning opportunities, and postsecondary interests and action items, in addition to referrals for social and other services as needed. Family engagement is a key component of BPL's approach, and parents participate in the planning and assessing of their children's work. During the pandemic, BPL advisors have continued to guide students' learning and support a range of academic, technical, and social-emotional needs.

Learn more: View BPL's outcomes; watch a webinar featuring the advisor role during distance learning

The core elements of a rapid-response Success Planning process include ensuring **access to learning**, mitigating gaps in **academic progress**, and addressing students' **social-emotional supports** and **enrichment opportunities**. The process results in the creation of a concrete plan and implementation strategy that will be revised periodically.

Access to learning:

- Computer or device
- Reliable, high-speed Internet
- Knowing how to access online learning
- Identifying other barriers to access (housing, childcare, etc.)

Academic progress:

- Assessment of on/off track in academic subjects
- Plan for academic intervention: summer, tutoring, etc.
- Family training and communication plan

Social-emotional supports:

- Assessment of need
- Connection to interventions and supports

Enrichment:

- Participation in enrichment and out-of-school opportunities

Recognizing that schools will have different priorities and capacities over the next few months, we present a range of options related to the different elements of Success Planning. Districts and schools should focus on the most urgent needs that they can address quickly and move toward more comprehensive options that can be added when they have the capacity and resources.

Key questions to consider:

- What elements will you include in your Success Planning?
- What does the navigator do and who will serve in this role?
- How will you capture information about students' needs and how they're being addressed?
- What training process and content will you provide?
- What is your structure for supporting navigators and linking to other services?
- What intake process, structure, and templates will you use?

Districts and schools will need to adapt this to fit their local context and needs. In addition, we have compiled a set of examples to illustrate what these steps look like in practice and related resources for further information.

Cultivating strong relationships through student cohorts: BARR

"BARR allows our students to have an identity and they have a team of teachers who know their story," according to Dr. Emily Shaw, Hemet High School principal in California.[4] BARR (Building Assets, Reducing Risks), a strengths-based national education model, facilitates the development of strong relationships between teachers and their students, families, and each other. Through a cohort structure, middle and high school teachers and students have an opportunity to develop connections and get to know each other. This also enables teachers to collaborate during shared meeting times, in which they discuss individual students' academic and nonacademic needs. Teachers use real-time data to gain a deeper understanding of each child—both in and out of school. When students require a more intensive level of support, a risk review team convenes, which includes a social worker/counselor, school administrator, BARR coordinator, and community providers as needed. BARR also seeks to meaningfully engage families in their children's learning through regular communication. Originally launched in St. Louis Park, Minnesota, BARR has since expanded across the country.

Learn more: Watch a video about how the BARR model works and view its results.

Elements to Include in Success Planning

Start with: Establish Supportive Individual Relationships

The most essential element of Success Planning is establishing a supportive relationship between an educator and a student—and for younger children especially, with the student's family as well—that provides a conduit for information and can serve as a foundation of trust and support in the future. Schools don't need to have all the elements of Success Planning in place to start cultivating these relationships, and they can build from this foundation as they develop plans and capacity.

Expand to: Additional Success Planning Components

Districts and schools will need to decide what other elements are the most important to include in their planning process. This can change over time—so schools may start with a smaller set of components and expand it later.

Most will probably want to include at least three: access to a computer and Internet, academic needs, and urgent issues related to mental health and social-emotional wellbeing. Depending on capacity, the school or district may also be able to identify needs for social services such as food, health, or housing support, in addition to enrichment opportunities This can change over time—so schools may start with a smaller set of components and expand it later.

⇒ **Establish a baseline relationship:** The initial conversation could take a number of forms. It could be as simple as a phone call asking a few basic questions about what the student/family would like the navigator and school to know about them and their experience during the shutdown and giving contact and other basic information. Alternatively, navigators could connect with students over FaceTime or other technology if they cannot meet in person—and even parents—for a more structured conversation about needs, strengths, and interests.

⇒ **Ensure access to hardware and Internet:** Despite schools' best—and sometimes very creative—efforts to ensure all students had devices and Internet access last spring, many students did not participate consistently in online learning. Navigators should gather information about each student's access and needs and communicate this to the person responsible for hardware and Internet at the school or district.

⇒ **Assess and address academic knowledge and needs:** Given the disruption of education in the spring, schools will need to assess each student's academic needs to determine what support they need and develop strategies for tutoring, supplemental material or classes, or other approaches to addressing the lost school time in the spring. The navigator can start this process by hearing from the student and family about areas of challenge and success. In some cases, the navigator may actually administer an academic assessment.

⇒ **Determine needs for social-emotional support:** Most students have experienced some level of trauma during the pandemic, ranging from the loss of in-person social connections and social isolation to the deaths of family or friends to food, housing, and income insecurity and loss. We also know that rates of abuse have risen during this time. Given these crises, it is important that adult navigators determine each student's needs for social-emotional support. Districts and schools may be able to use and/or adapt screening tools they already have to identify these needs.

⇒ **Connect students with social services:** Most navigators will not have the training, experience, or time to implement the elements of the Success Plan themselves. Schools should develop a structure in which the navigator gathers information and identifies needs, but then hands off implementation to other professionals who can either provide direct services or connect students with those who can. We discuss a

structure to support the navigators in more detail later in this guide. In the shorter term, schools and districts should use Success Planning to link children with services that are already available. In the longer term, their goal should be to aggregate the data to identify the greatest areas of unmet need across the school or district and to use this to expand the services to which they can connect children. Doing this will require staffing, funding, and a coordinated plan.

⇒ **<u>Guidance for families on supporting their children's learning:</u>** Caregivers, particularly of younger children, have taken on a greatly expanded role in managing their children's education during the pandemic, and many feel unequipped to do so. While many districts have surveyed parents in some form, most still do not know the full extent of the challenges and needs of families. Even more than before, families and schools need to work in partnership. Talking directly to families as part of the Success Planning process can give schools a better sense of the kinds of information and support they need and the specific challenges they're facing.

⇒ **<u>Connect students to enrichment:</u>** A key goal of Success Planning is to encourage children's interests and talents through afterschool and summer programming. While enrichment activities may be virtual or more limited during the pandemic, they remain important for children's development and wellbeing. As with social services, in the short-term districts and schools should connect students with existing opportunities, and in the long term they should work to expand these opportunities to fully meet the need.

Building connections with students and families through advisories, office hours, and parent advisory boards:
KIPP Academy Lynn Collegiate

A public charter high school located in Lynn, MA, KIPP Academy Lynn Collegiate (KALC) leverages structures such as advisory groups, office hours, and parent advisory boards to develop close relationships among students, teachers and other staff, and families.[5] The distinguishing feature of KALC's advisory lies in expanding the pool of staff to include counselors, learning specialists, aids, etc. who are not part of the Leadership Team, in addition to teachers. Expanding advisors decreases the number of families for each staff member to contact as announcements and opportunities for family feedback arise. Each staff member is responsible for building relationships with 12-18 students and their families. Advisory blocks are built into the school day every other day for 20-40 minutes during which advisors meet with students both in groups and individually. Advisors remain constant throughout a student's high school trajectory. This consistency promotes strong staff-to-student and staff-to-family relationships as advisors are aware of their students' histories and progress. KALC uses the advisory structure to disseminate announcements, routinely check-in with students regarding grades and behavior patterns, and call families. Regular grade-level meetings enable teachers and staff to discuss observations, progress, and concerns regarding student absences, behavior, and engagement.

Office hours, which are held after school, provide another structure for teachers and staff to cultivate relationships with students through informal conversations. As students walk into classrooms and offices to advocate, seek clarity, or bide their time as they wait for a practice to begin or ride to arrive, they create holistic relationships with staff members in which both parties are able to bring more of their selves into the conversation as constraints of the traditional classroom are not present. In addition, KALC intentionally engages families in a variety of ways, including regular communication about students' progress and challenges, quarterly conferences, and parent advisory boards. Informal gatherings via Facebook groups or in-person meetings allow the administration to quickly gather initial reactions and uproot unforeseen consequences of school choices.

Going forward, KALC aims to further strengthen relationships among teachers, staff, students, and families through even greater communication. The school plans to adapt its advisory structure, for example, by placing each staff as the primary school contact for a group of families based on their language needs and reducing the overall number of families for advisors. Within the updated model, each staff member will only be responsible for approximately 8 families, greatly reducing the overall number of families for advisors. Decreasing the size of advisories allows staff to call families more frequently for input prior to decisions being made.

Learn more: Visit the KIPP MA Public Charter Schools website for more information.

A circular diagram titled "Success Planning" at the center, surrounded by eight connected nodes: Supportive relationship between a navigator and student/family; Technology: hardware and Internet; Academic assessment and support plan; Social - emotional supports; Social services; Guidance for parents on supporting their children's learning; Enrichment.

The Role of the Navigator

Building a trusting, caring relationship between educators and students and their families is at the heart of the Success Planning process. The most important role for navigators is to spend time listening with empathy and getting to know their students and families. They also serve as a consistent presence that remains stable regardless of the form school takes.

> "Building a trusting, caring relationship between educators and students and their families is at the heart of the Success Planning process."

Who will serve as the navigator?

Administrators should work with teachers, families, counselors and students to determine how best to carry out the navigator role. In many cases, teachers will be the best option to serve as adult navigators. Other options include counselors, aides, or AmeriCorps or

other volunteers. Those serving in the role should be able to make a year-long commitment and should have the skills listed below.

What skills does the navigator need?

- Comfort talking with students and families
- Interest in learning about students and building trusting relationships
- Ability to connect with other staff and community providers as needed
- Basic understanding of counseling methods
- Cultural and linguistic competency
- Working through sample challenging scenarios

Fostering student success through a robust advisory system: New Trier High School

"The advisor room provides an antidote to anonymity, a home away from home," according to New Trier Township High School District 203 (New Trier).[6] With two campuses in Northfield and Winnetka, Illinois, New Trier is a comprehensive high school that established one of the first high school advisory programs in the country. The advisory program, which is staffed by faculty members, remains a core component of New Trier's educational approach and serves four functions, including personal adjustment, guidance, communication, and administration. Freshmen have an advisor during 9th grade and then are matched with a new advisor when they enter the school's grade 10-12 campus. This advisor meets with the same group of 25 students over the course of three years. Advisors develop personal relationships with students, supporting their academic progress, social-emotional needs, and enrichment opportunities. They intentionally engage families through regular communication about their child's experiences.

Learn more: View the Advisor Brochure and other information about the Advisor Program

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What do navigators do?

Start with:

- Get to know students and their families or caregivers and build trusting relationships through individual meetings. The involvement of the parents/caregivers and students will likely vary by the age of the students. Navigators should start with an initial meeting at or even before the beginning of

the school year to begin to develop a relationship and get a baseline understanding of needs and interests.

- Establish themselves as the primary point of contact and guide for information and support.

Expand to:

- Assess needs and co-create a plan for addressing those needs in conjunction with the student.
- Build relationships through advisory, small group meetings, or one-on-one meetings throughout the school year. The frequency and format for the rest of the year may vary. Schools with an existing advisory or robust homeroom structure may choose to build on these structures. Others will need to create time within the week when navigators and students can connect. At the beginning of the school year and during any times of transition—for example, if an individual student or an entire school needs to change their schooling mode—navigators and students might meet weekly. During more stable times, the frequency can diminish.
- Ensure the Success Plan is enacted through a tiered structure in which navigators are supported by counselors or other professionals.

What is your structure for supporting navigators and linking to other services?

Start with:

In most schools, navigators will be new to this role, and they may also have limited capacity or training to fully address the issues that arise during their meetings with students. Schools should start by setting up a tiered structure to support the navigators in which the navigators hand off responsibility for connecting students with supports and resources to counselors, administrators, or others. Schools should identify who will take on this support role and ensure students receive the supports they need. For example, there may be a designated person in the school or district who handles all technology-related requests and another who provides mental health counseling or referrals; alternatively, there may be a structure where a counselor or administrator at the school serves as an all-purpose coordinator for a number of navigators.

Expand to:

Ideally, Success Plans will continue to be a robust and integrated part of schools even beyond the pandemic. In the longer term, schools may consider rethinking duties and roles of existing counseling or other positions, or if possible, hire new ones, to coordinate and enact the plans. This expanded implementation of Success Plans could include developing relationships with outside service providers, maintaining data on students' needs, strengths and interests, and providing information and assistance to families in

connecting with services. City Connects and Communities In Schools both offer examples of what this can entail.

What Training Process and Content Do Schools Need to Get Started?

Start with:

Navigators are taking on new roles, and they will undoubtedly have a range of comfort levels doing this. Schools and districts should provide training to the navigators to clarify the role's parameters, model the process, and anticipate challenges. There are a few strategies that districts can use to support teachers and others in making this transition.

- Acknowledge that the skills a counselor or social worker develops through formal degree programs can't be replicated in a few short sessions. Navigators are not expected to have or develop that full set of capabilities.

- Districts and schools should recognize the time needed to serve as a navigator and build time explicitly for that function, whether for individual meetings, ongoing advisories, or a combination.

- Clarify the specific role the navigator will play in your school and communicate expectations for frequency, duration, and the type of interaction they will have with students and families. In most cases, navigators should be conduits for services rather than direct providers. Schools should make this explicit and clarify the chain of support, as we illustrated above.

- Model and practice example conversations, including ones that raise specific issues such as mental health challenges or language barriers. We provide some sample questions below.

Expand to:

Schools and districts should embed time throughout the year for navigators to share their experiences in this role and to identify areas for additional training and support. Communities may want to consider partnering with other organizations with extensive experience training teachers to serve as advisory leaders and to develop individual relationships with students, such as Big Picture Learning.

Understanding each student's interests, goals, and challenges through a restructured schedule: Unity Point School District*

"Building relationships with kids matter. Making sure that kids know what their full potential is matters."[7] In rural southern Illinois, teachers in the Unity Point School District in Carbondale are forging deeper connections with students doing just that. Teachers, who serve as advisors, began to meet individually with 8th grade students during the spring of 2019, with the goal of supporting their smooth transition into high schools. By building relationships with students, teachers identified their interests, strengths, and areas for growth. They co-developed a plan of action to guide each student's academic progress and social-emotional learning throughout the year. This personalized approach requires sufficient time, and Unity Point has created a schedule that enables teachers to meet individually with students, plan, collaborate with each other, and fulfill their classroom responsibilities. Teachers also intentionally involve parents in Success Planning, ensuring that they understand their child's progress and any specific needs. Since its initial launch, Unity Point has expanded Success Planning to all students in grades 5-8 and plans to implement the initiative for all K-8 students during the 2020-21 academic year.

Learn more: Watch a video featuring Unity Point's Success Planning.

Unity Point School District is a member of Resilient Southern Illinois/Partnership for Resilience, which is part of EdRedesign's By All Means initiative

Resources

Sample Questions for Initial Student/Navigator Conversation

- What are some things you like to do outside of school?
- What subjects do you like best?
- How did the rest of the school year go for you after schools closed?
- Did you have any trouble joining the Zoom meetings last spring?
- How are you feeling about the coming year?
- What's something you're looking forward to this year?
- Is there anything you're worried about?

Sample Success Plan Information Capture Template

Student Name:

Parent/caregiver Name(s):

Teacher/navigator Name:

Date:

Topic	Response	Additional details
Has reliable high- speed internet access		
Consistent computer access?		
Conditions for learning exist at home (quiet space, free of home responsibilities)		
Academic concerns of the student or parent?		
Mental health concerns?		
Engaged in enrichment/outside activities?		
Goals for the year		
Need for social services or other supports		
Other comments?		
Action steps needed		
Action steps taken (include date)		

Articles and other resources:

- [Why Every Student Should Have a Mentor and Every Teacher Should be One](#)
- [Video: Supporting personalized learning through advisory (Springfield Renaissance school)](#)
- [Learning together: How developing student relationships and social capital leads to thriving adults](#)
- [Advisory: 22 Ways to Build Relationships for Educational Success](#)
- [The Role of Advisory in Personalizing the Secondary Experience](#)
- [How schools can make advisories meaningful for students](#)
- [How 1-on-1 Time with Students Made Me a Better Teacher](#)
- Stand for Children's [Preventing a Lost School Year Guide](#) and [Advisors for All](#)
- CASEL's [SEL Guide](#) - look at Relationship focal area

Endnotes

[1] Kathryn Bradley and Laura E. Hernández, "Big Picture Learning: Spreading Relationships, Relevance, and Rigor One Student at a Time," 2019, Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute, https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Deeper_Learning_Networks_CS_Big_Picture_Learning_REPORT.pdf.

[2] Ibid.

[3] For more information about Big Picture Learning's 10 Distinguishers, see https://www.bigpicture.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=389353&type=d&pREC_ID=902235.

[4] BARR, "Focus on the Whole Student," https://barrcenter.org/strategies/focus-on-the-whole-student/. This information was derived from a former KIPP Academy Lynn Collegiate teacher.

[5] This text is excerpted from an internal case study written by Amy LoBue, a former KIPP Academy Lynn Collegiate teacher who served as a Fellow at the Education Redesign Lab during the summer of 2020. She drafted the piece in order to inform EdRedesign how KIPP Academy Lynn Collegiate leverages community, family, and student relationships, in addition to detailing transferable structures for schools who wish to strengthen such relationships.

[6] New Trier High School, "Advisor Program," https://www.newtrier.k12.il.us/advisersystem/.

[7] Unity Point School District, "Unity Point ISSP Student Overview," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-NUKy0-zrLU&feature=youtu.be.