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The Power of Relationships in Schools

A Parents' Viewpoint - National Survey

Our world is changing daily, but one thing remains clear: teacher-student relationships are a key factor in all young people's development. Search Institute is sharing new insights that show parents overwhelmingly agree that the relationships teachers forge with students play an important role in their growth, and that parents value these relationships and the positive impact they have on young people.

About the Survey:

Search Institute commissioned [YouGov](#) to conduct a national web-based survey of U.S. parents of school-age children. Building on Search Institute's work over the last decade^{1,2}, the survey focuses on **understanding parents' perceptions of the role of relationships between young people and their teachers and how to support educators and leaders to bring the value of Developmental Relation-**

ships to life. While relationships between students, teachers, and parents are known to be important, there is little known about how parents see these relationships. The survey emphasizes the importance of continuing to study these relationships, as well as how to strengthen the parent-teacher relationship.



What the Survey Shows and Why It Matters

Relationships are at the core of young people's development

As educators and administrators transition out of the educational field at increasingly high rates³, the educational sector is pushing for change, but relationships remain at the heart of youth development and progress.

- Students with stronger Developmental Relationships with their teachers had significantly better belonging, school climate, and motivation, at both the beginning and end of the school year, than students with worse Developmental Relationships.⁴
- Students with stronger Developmental Relationships with their teachers had

significantly better motivation and GPA, at both the beginning and end of the school year, than students with weaker Developmental Relationships.⁴

Through meaningful relationships, young people have the opportunity to learn about themselves, gain confidence, take on challenges, build resilience, and ultimately thrive as the result of having a strong web of supportive adults.⁵

More than half of parents surveyed believe that a strong student-teacher relationship has a positive impact on their children's growth and strengthens the priorities that parents have for their children.



The survey shows parents overwhelmingly agree that the relationships teachers forge with students play an important role in their growth.

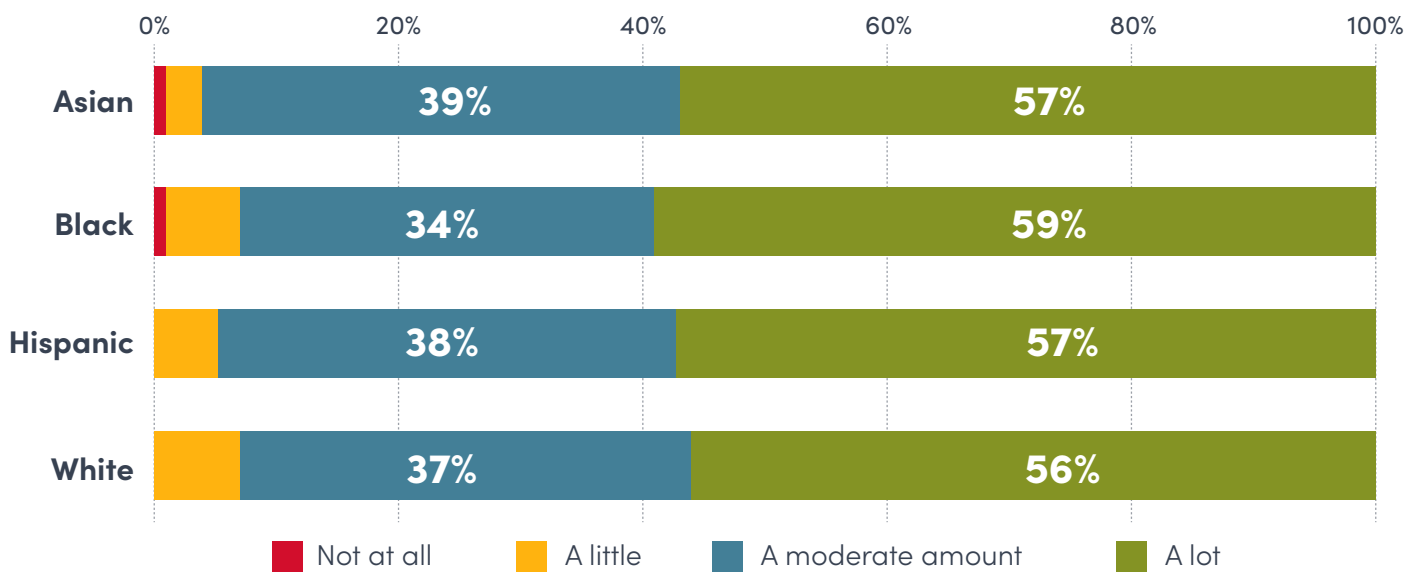
- More than half of parents surveyed believe that a strong student-teacher relationship has a positive impact on their children's growth and strengthens the priorities that parents have for their children.
- Of those polled, approximately four out of five parents reported somewhat or very strong relationships between teachers and their children.
- 74% of parents reported that teachers actively built strong relationships with their children.

Despite an increase in polarized political and social landscapes, parents are not as divided in their views on the importance of student-teacher relationships. There were no group differences across race/ethnicity, family income, parent marital status, parent employment, child gender, child Individualized Education Program (IEP) status, or child school type.



Parents are not as divided as we might think regarding the importance of student-teacher relationships.

How much does a student's relationship with their teachers impact their growth





Teachers and parents are partners in young people's growth

The teacher-student relationship is correlated with the teacher-parent relationship: teachers and parents are both important, interrelated socializers for young people's growth.

- The higher parents rate their relationship with their child's teacher, the better they perceive the relationship between teacher and child.

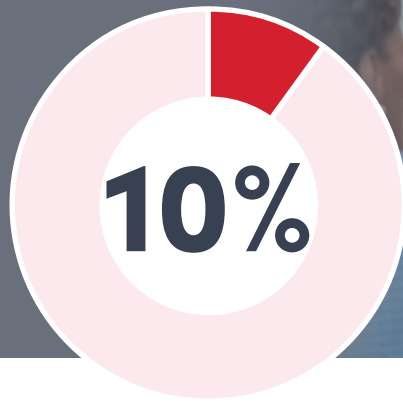
More than 60% of parents surveyed reported somewhat or very strong relationships with their children's teachers. However, there is room for growth, and parents shared some suggestions:

- Of the parents surveyed, the majority noted that increased collaboration and communication with teachers would further improve their relationship.

- Parents also reported that improved teaching conditions (increased pay, more support, etc.) would also lead to an improved relationship—highlighting the role educators' work environments and compensation play in ensuring they have the capacity to engage with families.

“All young people deserve to be valued and protected and to have their basic needs met.”

—Dr. Ben Houltberg, CEO, Search Institute



Although most parents surveyed reported somewhat or very strong relationships between teachers and their children, **more than 20% of parents** surveyed reported neither weak nor strong, somewhat weak, or even very weak teacher-child relationships.

Additionally, **10% of parents** reported somewhat or very weak relationships between themselves and their children’s teacher. A path forward may be present in the five elements of the Developmental Relationships Framework.

Trust is critical to building relationships and in fact is associated with the quality of parent-teacher relationships and parent perceptions of the quality of the relationship between teachers and their child.

Key Elements of Developmental Relationships

Developmental Relationships are close connections with adults, near-peers, and peers that help young people cultivate their abilities to shape their own lives, build resilience, and thrive. The teacher-student developmental relationship plays an important role in student learning and motivation.

- When presented with the five elements of [Search Institute’s Developmental Relationships Framework](#)—Express Care, Challenge Growth, Provide Support, Share Power, Expand Possibilities—parents surveyed indicated that all five elements were nearly equally important for teachers to demonstrate.



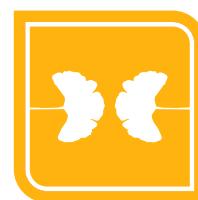
Express Care



Challenge Growth



Provide Support



Share Power



Expand Possibilities



Carving the Path Forward: Systemic change requires a community approach with young people at the center.

In order to effectively promote thriving among all young people, parents, educators, out-of-school and afterschool time practitioners, mentors, and others must agree that **all young people deserve to be valued, protected, and have basic needs met**. With that agreed upon understanding, these groups can work together to build meaningful relationships and encourage young people to thrive.

To address inequities among our young people, we must continue partnering with educators and school communities to honor all experiences, identities, and backgrounds, ensuring that parents and youth feel heard and present in their relationships with educators.

Search Institute is currently partnering with educators/practitioners, youth-serving organizations, and

key stakeholders supporting positive youth development, driving multiple applied research-based projects to co-create solutions to support practitioners, prioritize cultural responsiveness and inclusivity, identify tools and measurements regarding social capital, and focus on strengthening relationships between educators and parents. This is critical work to advance positive youth development and equity with relationship-building at their core.

About the Study: Methodology and Participants

YouGov conducted a web-based survey of 2,000 U.S. parents of K-12 students. To ensure a representative sample, YouGov selected eligible participants who matched specific U.S. parent population demographics and weighted responses according to parents' age, gender, race/ethnicity, educational attainment, and region based on population targets supplied by the 2020 Current Population Survey (CPS). The Survey was conducted July 8-21, 2022.

References

1. [Search Institute \(2020\). The Intersection of Developmental Relationships, Equitable Environments, and SEL](#)
2. [Scales, P. C., Roehlkepartain, E. C., & Houlberg, B. J. \(2022\). The elements of Developmental Relationships: A review of selected research underlying the framework. Search Institute](#)
3. [Walker, T. \(n.d.\). \(2022\) Survey: Alarming Number of Educators May Soon Leave the Profession | NEA. National Education Association.](#)
4. [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. Psychol Schs. 2020;57:646-677.](#)
5. [Developmental Relationships Help Young People Thrive \(2022\)](#)

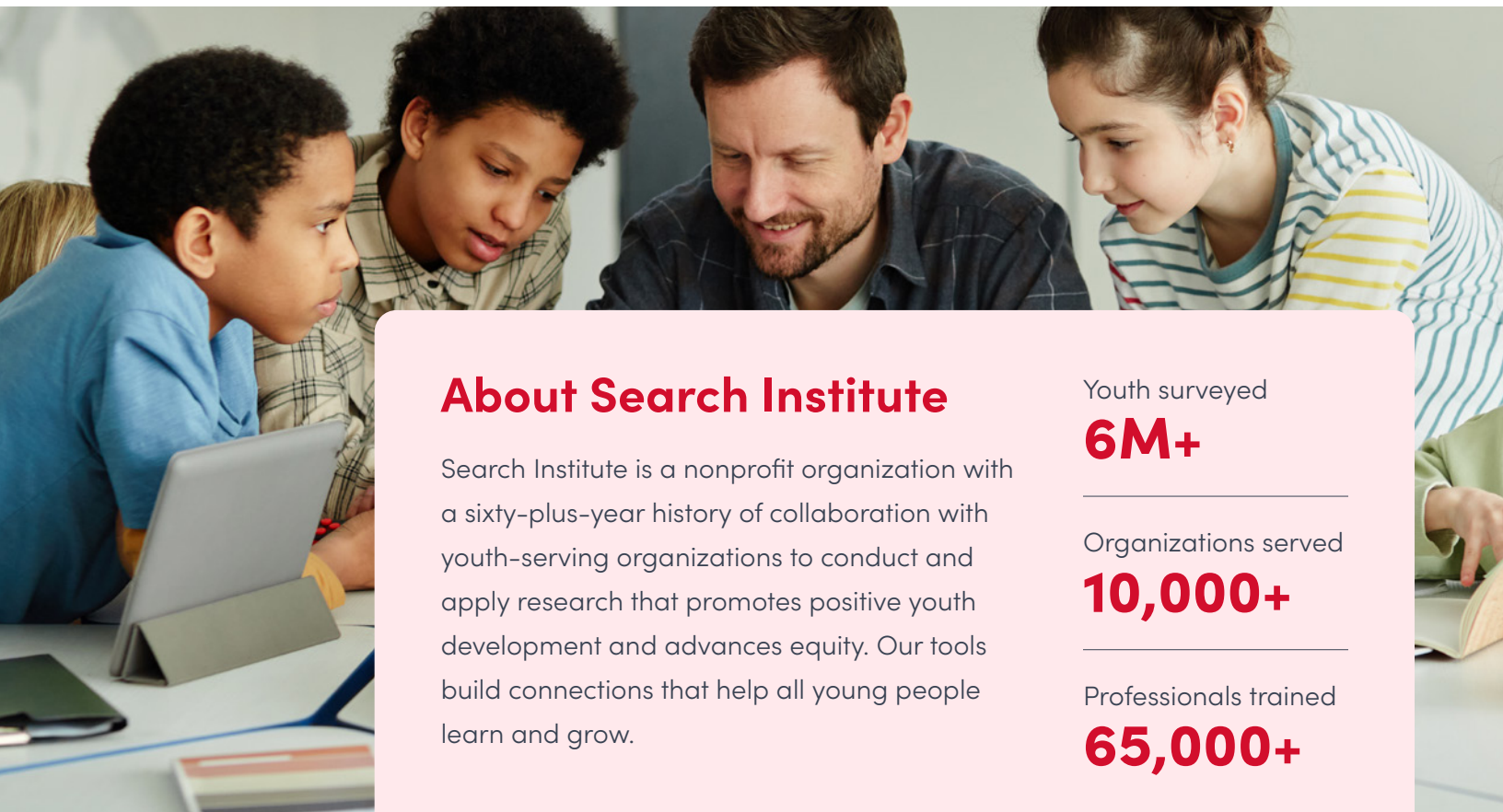
Learn more about [Developmental Relationships](#)

[Resources Hub](#)

A research-based collection of tools, activities, measures, and other resources designed to support educators and leaders in helping young people to succeed and thrive.

[Practical Solutions](#)

Professional learning, surveys, and practical solutions to support educators and leaders in helping young people to succeed and thrive.



About Search Institute

Search Institute is a nonprofit organization with a sixty-plus-year history of collaboration with youth-serving organizations to conduct and apply research that promotes positive youth development and advances equity. Our tools build connections that help all young people learn and grow.

Youth surveyed

6M+

Organizations served

10,000+

Professionals trained

65,000+