# Key Takeaways:
Positive Developmental Relationships

The Guiding Principles for Equitable Whole Child Design show how practitioners can integrate a range of structures and practices to maximize learning and development. Among its five elements are positive developmental relationships, which provide the foundation for student learning, development, and well-being and can support all members of a school community.

Relationships that are reciprocal, attuned, culturally responsive, and trustful are the essential ingredient in any learning setting. When relationships like these flourish, they can enable youth to grow their agency and confidence and become more able to learn skills, perform tasks, and take on new challenges. Further, a strong web of mutually supportive relationships between and among students, families, and staff helps all members of the community thrive and can even buffer the impact of stress to support learning and growth.

Schools can be organized to foster positive developmental relationships through structures and practices that support community members to deeply know one another and build trust and collaboration, including those that do the following:

Guiding Principles for Equitable Whole Child Design
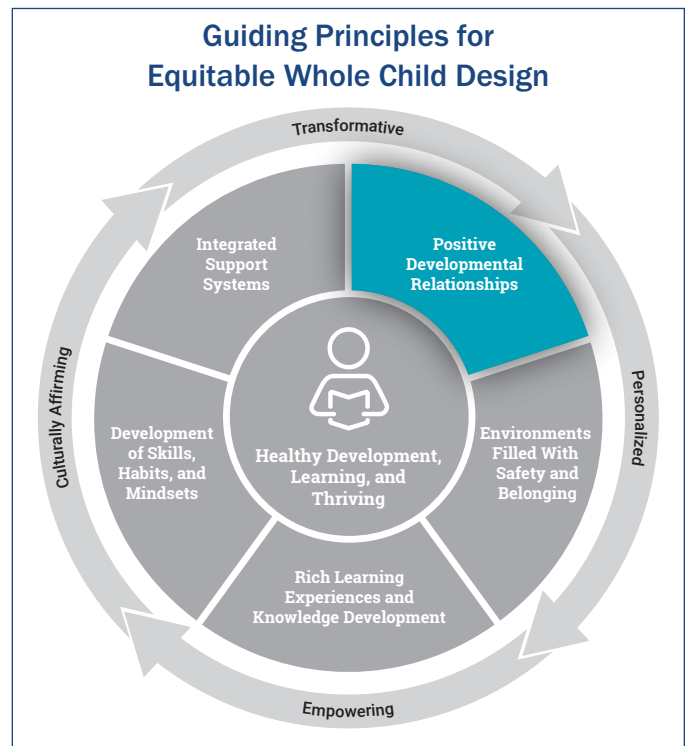
Personalize Relationships With Students: Continuity and consistency, as well as trust, respect, and valuing student identities, are key principles in building positive relationships with students. Effective structures that create time and space to build responsive and attuned relationships include:

- **looping**, which allows educators to be with the same children for more than 1 year;

- **advisory systems**, which create small family units within schools that provide each student with a home base, a caring community, and an adult advocate;

- **teaching teams**, which share a group of students, codevelop a coherent curriculum, and work jointly to support students' individual needs;

- **block scheduling**, which creates more time for teachers to collaborate and build relationships with a smaller number of students;

- **longer grade spans**, which allow for closer, longer-term relationships and smoother school transitions; and

- **small school size and/or small learning communities** that allow students to be well known and allow educators within the school to share norms and practices.

These personalizing structures are most effective when they are culturally affirming and joined with practices that build positive school culture, community, and trust.

Support Relationships Among Staff: School staff are more effective in settings where they have opportunities to collaborate with and learn from one another. In addition, student culture follows staff culture, making it important

for adults to embody the compassion, respect, growth mindset, and inclusiveness that we hope students will develop and convey. Structures that support the development of productive relationships among staff include:

- **collaboration planning time** for teachers in grade-level and/or content teaching teams that enables staff to plan curriculum, address problems of practice, build trust, and ensure students do not fall through the cracks; and

- **opportunities for shared learning, relationship-building, and decision-making**—including distributed leadership, staff meetings, events, rituals, and retreats for caring, communication, and collaborative school design that fosters school coherence.

Collaboration and professional learning among staff can be used to build shared teaching expertise, relational skills, and culturally responsive mindsets and teaching practices.

Build Relationships With Families: Family engagement provides opportunities for deeper knowledge of youth and greater alignment between home and school, increasing academic outcomes for students across all grade levels. Schools can cultivate these partnerships by developing structures that support school–family relations as part of the core approach to education. These can include:

- **tools for outreach and positive, regular communication** to actively engage families as partners, such as positive phone calls home, informational emails, and web access to student events and assignments;

- **student–teacher–family conferences** that are scheduled around families' availability and engage families in their students' learning; and

- **dedicated time and resources for home visits**—virtual or in person—which can allow for proactive, intentional interactions with families and enable educators and families to learn about and from one another.

Families from diverse backgrounds are more successfully engaged as partners when schools embrace shared responsibility and culturally and linguistically responsive orientations that communicate care, respect, and the importance of family expertise.

To see the full playbook, visit https://k12.designprinciples.org.