

Engaging Students Beyond the Classroom

Interview Excerpts

In Remix Podcast Episode 1, Karen continues her ongoing conversation and engagement with [David Adams](#), CEO of Urban Assembly. [Gizzelle Gonzales](#), a senior at the [Urban Assembly School for Collaborative Health Care](#) also joins the conversation. Their discussion explores Urban Assembly's multiple avenues for meaning making and how they are activating all adults to fully integrate academic, social, and emotional development and career readiness.

On Social Emotional Learning



Karen: There's a lingering tension between whether the best thing we need to be doing to support our Black and Brown students is doubling down on academics, or social-emotional learning, or real-life experience? I'm both frustrated and perplexed that when we talk about schools, we don't seem able to have this not be an either/or conversation. How do you explain to people how all of these things fit together?



David: The problems that we're facing with public education like, "How do we integrate academic, social, emotional development and career readiness?" are not "what problems." There are enough white papers written on them. There are enough people who sat on panels and said, "This is what should be happening". There are not enough people who are taking that "what" and trying to facilitate the actual systems and structures to get this working.

We're moving from "what" problems to "how" problems.

If we're going to really talk about how we integrate social, emotional, and cognitive development and academics, how do we talk about how to help young people really know where they are on that path of building those skills in a way that really is supportive of them and doesn't feel like more tests being put on Black and Brown kids that they're going to fail?

In the [Strong, Resilient NYC Initiative](#), all students will have an opportunity to get feedback on their social and emotional development. This is an initiative that is being led in part by the Urban Assembly with regards to making sure all 1600 schools and 1.1 million students in New York City have some sort of feedback on their social and emotional competence. Now, what does that feedback look like? And why is this important?

We know in the context of education that the number one driver for development for achievement is the quality of feedback.

If we're going to take social and emotional learning seriously, and if we're going to sit with young people and say, "We want you to graduate college, career, and community ready," we all need to be able to take them aside and say, "Hey, I saw the way that you solve that problem. I'm wondering if next time you can do this. I'm wondering if next time you can think about this." So, the goal of this assessment is to create language and some clarity.



Karen: You've talked about how this is really happening for all of *your* students, and that's not happening across the country. So, how are you taking this to scale? As you move beyond New York City, where you actually get to walk in and out of buildings, and you're trying to take it across the country, how do you get these ideas across in ways that really create the experiences that are comparable to the kind that Gizzelle and her classmates have had?

David: First, I will say that one of the key pieces that we're doing is serving as proof of concepts for other school districts and other organizations across the country that this is possible. At the Urban Assembly, we're working in district schools – public schools. They're not charter schools. They are working in the same constraints that other district schools are working in.

The first thing that we look to do as we move this across the country is create clarity in terms of what we mean. Is it about being nice to people? Or is it about developing relationships? Well, it's probably a little bit of both.

We have a list of 11 to 14 social and emotional competencies.

Students demonstrate the ability to manage their emotions. Students demonstrate awareness of their needs and emotions.



These are linked to adult competencies that allow adults to model them, to activate these opportunities, as well as create experiences for students to demonstrate these skills.

We're not going to come in and say, "I want your student to be more self-aware". We're going to say, "Let's make sure that students have an understanding of how to access external supports," and "How do we communicate a school community in which students have clarity around their external supports and how they can use them to solve problems?"

Additionally, we envisioned social-emotional learning in the really broad sense of what learning is. Learning is the ability to integrate understandings and knowledge and shift behaviors.

That means social and emotional learning is giving students an opportunity to learn through instruction, learn through extracurricular, learn through behavior supports, and learn through adults modeling how to understand and problem solve around these concepts.

