

Podcast Season 1

## Embracing Education's Hidden Essential Workforce

by Karen Pittman & Katherine Plog Martinez

Remix Blog

In our conversations with local communities and national organizations alike, we regularly push for a more holistic look at communities to identify all the adults that are supporting young people. Throughout the pandemic we've been reminded that when trying to identify these adults we can't just look across different settings we have to look deeply *within* each setting as well. The first season of Changing the Odds Remix podcast reinforced this for us.

We heard clearly that for our podcast guests their work to connect with their community and awareness of their role in a broader learning and development ecosystem starts first by building a school culture that engages and leverages not just all students, but all adults.

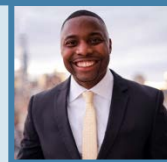


Ron Berger, EL Education  
*Episode 2*

"At EL Education we have a big push on making sure we build what we call a spirit of crew, a spirit of teamwork of looking out for each other among all staff members of a school."

*"It's essential that we not limit this to teachers.*

*From a student experience, every adult in the building matters. The bus driver matters. The person who is greets them at the door matters. The secretaries in the office matter. The assistants, the counselors, the nurses, the custodians, everyone in the building. If those people are also not modeling their courage, compassion, kindness, respect that we all want to model in a school, it has a profound effect on students."*



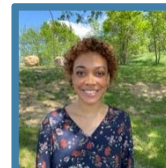
David Adams, Urban Assembly  
*Episode 1*

"We have a common operating picture around the roles that adults should be playing in developing a sense of culture in our schools."

*"That means deans. That means teachers. That means cafeteria workers.*

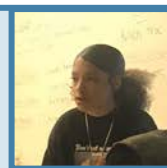
*To the extent that we can, we want to create a sense of who we are and how we're modeling who we are so that young people can see in the staff the attributes for solving problems that we want them to develop."*

And the young leaders echoed that the adults with whom they connected most weren't always teachers. A wide range of adults (they used terms like staff, mentors, advisors and talked about specific roles of coaches and nurses) helped them feel centered, connection and belonging.



Olivia Christensen  
Education Reimagined  
*Episode 4*

"I think one of the biggest things for me that changed when I made that transition into Iowa Big was that I actually was considered a whole person by every single one of the faculty members or the mentors."



Gizzelle Gonzales  
Urban Assembly Senior  
*Episode 1*

"The staff can include the teachers. The staff includes anybody who helps contribute to Urban culture. It's not really a label. I can put anybody who contributes Urban culture."



Margarida Celestino  
EL Education Graduate  
*Episode 2*

*"I personally had a very good relationship with our school nurse and it was nice to see that someone besides my teachers cared about me outside of the classroom. She didn't care about my grades. She didn't care about how much I spoke in class. She was just solely there to make sure that if I had any concerns about myself OR Had any worries or any questions, I was able to go to her as an adult and that is because she is very inclusive of every student."*

The Fordham Institute first dubbed the non-teachers in a school building "The Hidden Half". In so doing, their report [The Hidden Half: School Employees Who Don't Teach](#) called for caution in the growth of these positions and ensuring that staffing linked positions to need. They placed particular emphasis on instruction.

The focus on this hidden half has been evolving during the COVID-19 pandemic, this time with early attention to the workforce impact as schools went virtual. This time, conversations about this 50% of the school staff led with compassion. [Questions began to surface about how extended school closures would impact jobs like bus drivers, paraprofessionals, and cafeteria workers.](#) As the out-of-school time field was leaning in to provide safe learning spaces and opportunities for young people, we weren't yet asking about the connections students were missing beyond those in the classroom.

When schools reopened in fall 2021, the narrative was about the staffing shortages related to this hidden half. [An EdWeek article was the first publication I saw that pointed out not just the logistical impact of the hidden "essential workforce",](#) but went further noting:

*"What often gets overlooked, though, is the impact the workers who fill these positions have on students and their learning experiences...When longtime bus drivers retire or decide they don't want to continue working in sub-optimal conditions, students lose out on starting each morning with a friendly, familiar face. When assistants for students with disabilities have to leave in the middle of the day, the students they serve lose the stability of an aide who knows their schedule and emotions inside and out."*

As we are deep in the latest surge of COVID we are all exhausted. We face the ongoing workforce shortages compounded by illness-induced absences among teachers, the hidden half, and out-of-school time and community program providers. It is easy to see these as separate workforces and tempting to see the non-teaching workforces as a substitute teaching recruitment pool rather than valuing the roles they already play. Ron Berger reminds us, however, that it takes intentional efforts to not only train but connect all of these adults to create a cohesive, equitable school culture:

*"We had to negotiate with the district to make sure that we could get staff members together and have those conversations about the kind of human beings we want to be with our students and how we'll make sure that every student's identity is honored in the school, how we make sure every student feels that he or she or they belong in the school. I think we should always think of the school culture as the staff culture...It is really a focus on "staff crew" in order to create the conditions for a good "student crew." I think that we need to make all staff feel empowered because they are all making a difference in student lives."*

# CHANGING THE ODDS *Remix*

Our first season's podcast guests affirmed our belief that the disruption all adults (including families) have experienced [when out of school time was all the time](#) has pulled back the curtains and softened the walls between schools and communities. We have a unique opportunity to engage the wide spectrum of adults charged with creating safe, supportive, stimulating learning opportunities for young people to see themselves as parts of teams that empower young people to build the relationships, resilience, routines *needed to pursue interests and studies*

***Our ask of you is this:*** How can you be the voice regularly calling for the “spirit of crew” and pushing that we solve these challenges together?

