

The To&Through Middle Grades Network (MGN) is a group of CPS schools dedicated to creating more equitable and responsive educational environments where middle grades students thrive. The network aims to *increase the number of students with attendance at or above 90% and GPAs at or above 3.0 (i.e. condensed elementary on-track) through a meaningful increase in students' sense of belonging.*

Participating schools in each cohort work to redefine the middle grades experience by using qualitative and quantitative data to understand student experiences, develop a problem of practice, and test change ideas that positively impact the experiences and outcomes of middle grades students.

This profile shares the journey of one MGN school in hopes of inspiring others to reimagine systems and structures to ensure that middle grades students thrive.

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. ACADEMY OF SOCIAL JUSTICE LOCATED IN ENGLEWOOD



SY2022 - 2023 TEAM MEMBERS

- Principal
- Assistant Principal
- School Counselor
- Middle School Math Teacher
- Middle School Science Teacher
- Two Middle School Diverse Learner Teachers
- Instructional Coach
- Interventionist

STUDENTS

School Grades: PreK -8

Number of Students: 227

Middle Grades Enrollment: 65

DEMOGRAPHICS

93% Black

14% Diverse Learners

95% Low Income

DEFINITION OF STUDENT SUCCESS

Students at King are successful when they:

- Demonstrate the ability to support their peers;
- Utilize growth mindset language;
- Use their voices to solve real-world problems individually and as a collective; and
- Are celebrated for their academic and social-emotional growth.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Academy of Social Justice

Year One Improvement Story

YEAR ONE

CHANGE IDEA RATIONALE

In spring 2022, the King Academy team gave a student experience survey to all middle grades students, conducted empathy interviews with middle grades boys, and did student shadows with some diverse learner students. Overall trends highlighted that students had strong relationships with teachers but struggled to connect with each other in meaningful ways. More specifically, the Elevate survey revealed that 72% felt class was welcoming but only 42% felt comfortable sharing their thoughts and opinions. The team also reviewed historical outcomes data and reviewed Q1 grades and attendance data using the Grades Monitoring Tool in fall 2022 and found that 64% of 7th grade male-identifying students were on track, but 17% needed intensive support (i.e. had a GPA below 3.0 and attendance below 90%).

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

1. Students have an interest in current events and are willing/want to discuss; and with clear parameters, they are able to engage in rich discussions.
2. By laying out very concrete ground rules and continuously reinforcing them, you can create a safer-feeling environment in middle grades advisories.
3. Through regular meetings and being able to respond and make action plans to support students, you can increase community building as a middle grades team.

Data Sources

- **Student Experience Survey** given to all 6th - 8th grades students in May 2022.
- Quarterly **Elevate surveys** given to all 6th - 8th grade advisory classes.
- Quarterly data from the **Grades Monitoring Tool**.
- **Exit tickets** following student-led discussions.

YEAR ONE

CHANGE IDEA

Student-Led Discussions during Advisory

- Pairs of teachers supported student-led discussions during advisory. The discussions started with 7th grade boys and rolled out in all 6th-8th grade advisories by the end of school year.
- Students selected topics to discuss and co-created ground rules with their advisory teachers.
- The goal was to strengthen peer-to-peer relationships and classroom community in response to an uptick in peer conflicts post-pandemic.

YEAR ONE

IMPACT

Student-led discussions were a powerful change idea that allowed students to use their voices to solve real world problems individually and collectively. Students discussed topics such as relationships, abortion, and the teen takeovers that occurred in downtown Chicago in spring 2023. Teacher observations revealed that students learned how to form and express fact-based opinions in a way that respected and engaged peers. In fact, King saw a 3% increase in Classroom Community in Elevate for all middle grades students and also saw a 2% increase in Student Voice and 6% increases in Meaningful Work and Teacher caring for male-identifying students specifically. Students also noted that they were able to hold themselves and their peers accountable to the ground rules they set to ensure the conversations were productive.

The King Academy team plans to build on the success of student-led discussions by hosting the conversations every other week in all middle school advisory classes. Students will have the week between discussion to research the upcoming topics so the discussion is further grounded in facts.