

**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.

## NASH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LOCATED IN THE AUSTIN COMMUNITY



### SY2022 - 2023 TEAM MEMBERS

- Principal
- Middle School Science Teacher
- Middle School Math Teacher
- Middle School Social Studies Teacher
- Middle School ELA Teacher
- Middle School Diverse Learners Teacher

### STUDENTS

**School Grades: PreK-8**

**Number of Students: 257**

**Middle Grades Enrollment: 72**

### DEMOGRAPHICS

**77.4% Black**

**19.1% Diverse Learners**

**11.3% Low Income**

**75.5% FRPL**

### DEFINITION OF STUDENT SUCCESS

*Students at Nash are successful when:*

- They are supported by the middle school team with consistency, stability, and structure.
- The team offers students a sense of belonging.

# Nash Elementary School

## Year One Improvement Story

### YEAR ONE

### CHANGE IDEA RATIONALE

In spring 2022, the Nash team conducted surveys, empathy interviews, focus groups, and student shadows with their middle grades students. Survey results revealed that though many students felt that their identity was affirmed at school, they didn't feel a strong sense of teacher caring or that they could comfortably share their thoughts and opinions in class. During the empathy interviews and focus groups, students shared that sometimes language, especially for the Latinx students, was a barrier and that there was confusion by all students regarding systems in school, especially the discipline policy.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

- Incorporation of social emotional learning into everyday classroom activities helped to build meaningful connections with students.
- Checking in with students in a purposeful and intentional way allowed educators to take the time to show care in a way that students received.

### Data Sources

- Quarterly [Elevate survey](#) results related to the Teacher Caring, Classroom Community, and Meaningful Work learning conditions.
- Staff created **student surveys** to gather additional information from students regarding their experiences in the classroom
- Quarterly review of the [Grades Monitoring Tool](#) to identify students in need of additional support.

### YEAR ONE

### CHANGE IDEAS

#### Relationship mapping and intentional check-ins to build student-educator relationships

- Through a [student survey](#) that asked which core teacher students had a connection with and a [relationship mapping activity](#) completed by the MGN teachers, each teacher identified 5-7 students who did not feel a strong connection to a staff member to intentionally check-in with throughout the week.
- Teachers checked in with students for at least two minutes, 3-5 times a week on topics other than schoolwork. Then every two weeks, they reflected as a team on the connections they built during those interactions and any information that needed to be shared with the team.

#### Would You Rather community building to foster peer to peer and student-educator relationships

- The Nash team started with an ambitious change idea of building an intentional advisory calendar and structure, but due to staffing shortages, the schedule was modified before that change idea was implemented effectively.
- During the second semester, in order to foster stronger relationships, teachers implemented community building at the beginning of each class. Using "Would You Rather" questions, they helped build stronger connections between students and were able to meaningfully tie the questions to their curriculum.

### YEAR ONE

### IMPACT

*Relationship Mapping + Intentional Check Ins* highlighted the fact that relationships are key and that letting students see teachers as humans is valuable. Teachers shared that getting to know the students better during check-ins allowed them the time to show care in a way that students received. These check-ins also helped students take time to check-in with themselves.

*"Would You Rather" questions and Community Building* at the start of class helped build a sense of belonging and connection between students and with teachers. These questions also bridged the gap between what students were learning in class and their lives outside of school.

Nash saw 1-2% gains on the Elevate Survey in the Affirming Identities, Classroom Community, Teacher Caring and Meaningful Work learning conditions. For the individual question about whether students feel comfortable sharing thoughts and opinions in class, there was a 6% increase, and there was a 5% increase in students feeling like the work they do in class is meaningful. Nash plans to start both of these initiatives earlier in the 2023-2024 school year to build on their learning and success.