

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.

NIGHTINGALE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LOCATED IN GAGE PARK



MGN TEAM MEMBERS

- Principal
- Assistant Principal
- School Counselor
- Dean of Students
- 5th grade teacher
- 7th grade teacher



NightingaleElementary School

Year One Improvement Story

YEAR ONE

CHANGE IDEA RATIONALE

In spring 2020, Nightingale analyzed quantitative outcome data for their middle grade students and conducted surveys with students and parents. They learned that students wanted their voices part of the decision-making process around academic instruction and that most students struggled with engagement in remote learning despite strong connections to adults. School-level data also indicated that attendance for middle school girls (5th - 8th grade) was lower than for middle school boys.

STUDENTS

School Grades: PreK - 8

Number of Students: 973

Middle Grades Enrollment: 486

DEMOGRAPHICS

97.3% Latinx

41.2% English Learners

83.0% Low Income

Data Sources

- **The Getting to Know You survey** revealed that students wanted to be included in the school's decision-making processes.
- **Pulse check surveys** were regularly given to understand the social-emotional learning needs of students.
- **Historical grades and attendance data** revealed an attendance gap between middle school girls and boys.

YEAR ONE

CHANGE IDEA

Student Voice Committee

- Nightingale launched a Student Voice Committee (SVC) that met weekly and, in partnership with the MGN team, analyzed data, made recommendations, and helped plan activities to increase attendance, engagement, and face time from students during remote learning.
- The SVC had representation from each of the middle grades (5th - 8th) to ensure the concerns of all middle grades students were represented.
- The goal was for the SVC to provide feedback on how to bridge and strengthen relationships between staff and students, and empower students to make changes in the school.

YEAR ONE

IMPACT

With the creation of the **Student Voice Committee**, all students could see their feedback implemented directly into classes. The SVC provided students with leadership opportunities, which they put in practice both inside and outside of the committee. Through the pulse check surveys, students reported feeling more heard. As one fifth-grade SVC member noted, *"we knew that what we were reporting was being taken seriously. It felt good to practice our SVC leadership skills and then see the changes our teachers were making."*

The SVC strengthened connections between staff and students by surveying their classmates about which platforms were most engaging in a virtual space and planning Fun Fridays with games and time for connection in a hybrid option. By the end of the year, despite being hybrid, most students felt connected to at least one staff member. With a focus on social emotional learning (SEL) and building community, [teachers] *"immediately noticed an increase in participation and engagement."*

Nightingale Elementary School

Year Two Improvement Story

YEAR TWO

CHANGE IDEA RATIONALE

70% of Nightingale students remained remote through the end of the 2020-2021 school year, sparking a need for more robust community-building strategies. They decided to answer this need with more dedicated time for SEL and new ways to recognize student success. Using Elevate data, Nightingale also found that middle grades boys were 15% less likely to find their classroom work meaningful than girls. In Year Two, Nightingale explored new strategies to level this disparity.

Nightingale's Definition of Student Success

Nightingale celebrates everything about YOU: emotions, actions, details, mindset, and energy.

Nightingale celebrates your accomplishments on the following levels: social and emotional connection, academic engagement, and contributions to building our positive school culture.

Data Sources

- **Elevate survey** results related to the Meaningful Work learning condition.
- **Classroom observations**
- MGN Team created a **survey for boys** in the Becoming A Man (BAM) program.
- **Grades and attendance data**

YEAR TWO

CHANGE IDEAS

Redefining SEL Instruction and a Holistic Definition of Success

- In the beginning of the school year, Nightingale focused on building connections and continuing schoolwide SEL instruction throughout the day.
- This SEL time was dedicated to revitalizing both the sense of school community and developing a holistic definition of student success.
- Some students' achievement was not being acknowledged by traditional academic measures so Nightingale used the [definition of student success](#) they created through MGN to recognize growth via qualitative measures and goal setting.

Competitive Activities and Meaningful Work

- 5th grade math teachers implemented two days of competitive academic activities each week.
- 5th grade math teachers also regularly and explicitly asked students to reflect on and to share how and if the lessons being taught were meaningful.
- The goal was to better engage male students in math class and ensure all students saw the connections between lessons and real life.

Nightingale Elementary School Year Two Improvement Story

YEAR TWO

IMPACT

SEL Instruction and Holistic Definition of Success: The Nightingale SVC focused on ways to bring the student success definition to life. Students in the SVC created a video and posters, and contributed to a lesson plan to help other students embody the holistic definition of success. Through this work, students' definition of their own success became part of Nightingale's culture and increasingly recognized by both their peers and teachers. As one teacher noted, *"when our class focused on the definition, I saw more kids feeling included for who they really are. It wasn't just about grades anymore or who was the smartest."*

Competitive Activities like math games allowed students to see how their feedback affected change in their classrooms and increased the sense of pride they had as Nightingale students. They were also willing to be more open, as they saw teachers changing instruction to better meet their needs. Among male students engaged in competitive activities, perceptions of meaningful work improved by 19%.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Throughout their journey, Nightingale educators noted their most important lessons about improving the experiences and outcomes of middle grades students:

- 01** Centering student voice means intentionally including voices that may not always be heard.
- 02** When including students in the decision making process, they need access to and support in understanding how to use data for making decisions.
- 03** Small wins show students how their voices influence decisions and help them continue working towards their goals.
- 04** It's critical to be flexible when change ideas need to be refined. Pivoting is not a loss of progress, and no "one size fits all".



Year Three Improvement Story

In their third year as part of the MGN, Nightingale focused on sustaining their school-wide Student Voice Committee (SVC) while growing student voice practices in individual classrooms. Nightingale added two additional teachers to support the SVC and the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) identified additional ways for classroom teachers to elicit student voice. In their SVC, Nightingale focused on sharing data with students to co-create resources and change ideas. One area of consistent focus has been using Elevate data to help students feel more comfortable sharing their thoughts and opinions in class. The SVC created a video and [one-pager](#) to help teachers better understand what students need in order to feel comfortable.

The other area of focus for the SVC was reflecting on why students may have above a 90% attendance but below a 3.0 GPA using the [Grades Monitoring Tool](#). Nightingale educators identified this as a group that they wanted to better support and used student input to better understand the student experience in classrooms. Students shared that they had varying knowledge of how to check their grades and that they needed more opportunities in school to reflect on where they are now and how they could improve. The students helped create a protocol for teachers to pilot during the 4th quarter with positive feedback.

As Nightingale moves into alumni status in the 2023-2024 school year, they will use their learnings from the MGN to focus on student voice at a school and classroom level through their SVC and classroom practices. They plan to implement a Check and Reflect protocol at the beginning of the school year so students better understand where they are doing well and where they can continue to improve.

