



Student Stories: Growing Pains & Gains in Middle Grades
Practitioner Learning Experience
Learning from the experiences of young people

Context

While we know that being On Track in 6th-8th grade increases the likelihood that students will enroll in college, the reasons behind these patterns are often more complex than academic performances. The following stories explore four CPS graduates' insights into how the relationships, supports, and struggles they experienced during their middle grades (6th - 8th grade) careers shaped their personal and academic growth and share their reflections on how these experiences influenced their chosen college pathways.

It is important to note that these stories are not meant to be a representation of all pathways taken by CPS students or a message about which pathways students should or should not take. However, it is our hope that these stories allow you to build upon your understanding of the motivations, opportunities, and challenges facing CPS students along their education journeys and explore opportunities to connect this student data to the experiences and support of the young people you may serve.

Learning Goal

Educators and practitioners will:

- Engage in discussion of CPS alumni student reflections on their education experiences
- Make connections to their own school context and student support practice
- Explore opportunities to adapt current student support efforts and ground future student support efforts in student experiences.

Facilitation & planning notes

- This learning experience is designed as a 45 minute group activity and discussion.
 - Ideally, there would be more time to delve into discussion. If you have more time, expand the time to discuss, particularly the whole group discussion.
 - If you need to shorten the plan, consider providing the Student Stories as pre-work or skipping the jigsaw and doing just one Student Story that the whole group reads and discusses.
- This learning experience asks participants to engage in jigsaw discussion of 3 different Student Stories. Choose the 3 Student Stories that seem like they will best resonate with your team. Here are 3 recommended stories to start with, but please check out the full list of Student Stories to choose those that feel most relevant to your team.
 - [Kimaya](#)
 - Kimaya is a Black college student who grew up in Woodlawn. She transferred to several elementary schools before starting 7th grade



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at a magnet school in the South Loop. She is currently a Senior at a 4-year state university in Pennsylvania and is going to graduate with a degree in Psychology.

- [Alejandro](#)
 - Alejandro is a Mexican-American college student who grew up in West Lawn. He went to a neighborhood K-8th elementary school in West Lawn. He is the first in his family to attend college and is currently a Sophomore studying advertising at a 4-year state university in Illinois.
- [Zayquan](#)
 - Zayquan is a Black college student who grew up in Lawndale. He went to K-8 neighborhood elementary school with a Magnet Cluster program in Lawndale. He is a Sophomore studying business management at a private 4-year college in Tennessee.
- [Michelle](#)
 - Michelle is a Mexican-American and first-generation college student who grew up in Gage Park. For middle school she went to a 6th-8th school in Gage Park. She is a Junior at a private liberal arts college in Wisconsin, majoring in Business Economics.

Resources:

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Learning Experience

Topic & Approximate Timing	Learning Activity/Content
Framing 5 mins	<p>We spend so much time examining quantitative data and metrics, but we also know that qualitative data is just as important. Student stories help us to humanize the data and learn from the lived experiences of young people. These student stories are real recent CPS alumni and help us understand the changes in the current landscape.</p> <p>Research has shown that elementary and middle school educators can and do provide critical supports that set students up for long-term success: Students with strong grades and attendance in elementary school were more likely to graduate high school and enroll in college than their peers. While CPS has continued to expand the post secondary pathways available to CPS graduates, immediate college</p>



	<p>enrollment remain the most popular postsecondary pathway for CPS graduates.</p> <p>We'll be looking at some stories today that highlight real CPS alumni and their reflections on how their middle grades (6th-8th grade) experiences influenced the postsecondary paths they have taken with the goal of reflecting on how we can improve both our individual and systemic practices to support our students.</p>
<p>Jigsaw small groups</p> <p>5-6 mins: reading</p> <p>15 mins: small group discussion</p>	<p>Divide up into 3 groups (or, if your group is larger, 6 groups and have 2 groups read the same student story). Give each group one of the student stories.</p> <p>Read the student story (independently or aloud, your group can choose). As you read, highlight or make note of sentences or phrases that stand out to you. Be prepared to share one sentence or phrase with your group.</p> <p>Introduce/re-introduce yourself to the group and share one sentence or phrase that stands out to you from the student story.</p> <p>Discussion questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ How does this student's story connect to the data story of CPS and the schools you work with?<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ In what ways is this student's experience similar to or different from the experiences of the students you have worked with?○ What are some Cultivate Survey learning conditions you noticed up in this student's story?○ Imagine you have 15+ students in similar situations that your team is working with. What systems and structures do you have in place/could you put in place to support these students?○ Zoom in on the student's "what worked" and "hopes for the field" sections. What do you think your schools are doing well to support students like this one? What could you do differently or better? <p>Make sure to choose someone from your group to share with the whole group.</p>



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Whole group discussion 15 mins	Each small group should share a 1-2 minute summary of the student story they looked at and what it is making them think about their work. After each group shares, engage in a collective discussion as a whole group: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What systems and structures do you have in place/could you put in place to support similar students?• What actions or next steps is this making us want to take as a team?• These are just a few students' stories. How can you/the teams you support learn more of the stories of the students and alumni at your specific schools/organizations?
Closing 3 mins	Let's do a final whip around and share either: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1 word or phrase that's sticking with you from this discussion OR• 1 action you personally hope to take personally as you leave this time today

Aligned To&Through data, tools, and research to accompany this discussion

- [To&Through Elementary Milestones Tool](#)
- [Elementary On-Track: Elementary School Students' Grades, Attendance, and Future Outcomes](#)
 - [Practitioners guide](#)
- [Uchicago Impact Cultivate Survey Information](#)