

Sustaining Change

A To&Through Case on Improving Classroom Community Through Data



To&Through
Middle Grades
Network

This learning case was informed by interviews, quotes, and stories from the [To&Through Middle Grades Network](#) Team and middle grades educators in Chicago Public Schools, but the school, coach, and educators in this case have been anonymized and are meant to represent the work of multiple Middle Grades Network schools.

Context

[Research](#) indicates that teachers play a significant role in creating the learning conditions that adolescents need in order to feel a sense of belonging in their classrooms and strengthen their non-cognitive abilities, which contributes to improved academic performance including grades and attendance.

In 2022 Chicago Public Schools rolled out the [Cultivate](#) survey district wide for grades 5-12. Cultivate is administered twice a year and is designed to measure learning conditions and feedback on student classroom experiences that can inform changes in teacher and school practice. The UChicago To&Through [Middle Grades Network](#) uses Cultivate along with a similar tool called [Elevate](#) that provides real-time data on learning conditions in individual classrooms and can be given multiple times per year.

The five [learning conditions](#) prioritized by MGN as measured through Elevate are:

- Classroom Community
- Feedback for Growth
- Meaningful Work
- Student Voice
- Teacher Caring

The following Learning Case shares a snapshot of a neighborhood elementary school in their second year of the Middle Grades Network that is using Elevate data to inform practice and shape their change ideas. Prior to joining MGN, this school had a [Elementary OnTrack rate](#)¹ of 32% with increasing numbers of students needing attendance support and intensive support.

During the first year of MGN, the team focused on improving the Teacher Caring and Classroom Community learning conditions and implemented a change idea of Question of the Day where students spent homeroom time sharing their perspectives on a fun and engaging question. The team saw huge gains in Teacher Caring (+12%) over the first year and a modest increase in Classroom Community (+2%) in part through the Question of the Day strategy and also through a concerted effort to center positive relationships across the middle grades team. They are in their second year of the partnership and are navigating multiple transitions while trying to figure out how to sustain their

¹ *Elementary OnTrack is defined as students with above a 3.0 GPA and above 90% attendance. Students needing attendance support have above a 3.0 but less than 90% attendance and students needing intensive support have below a 3.0 and below 90% attendance.*

change ideas and the MGN work.

OCTOBER 2023 [YEAR 2 OF MGN]

Mr. Burgos, a third-year math teacher and Middle Grades team lead, sits down next to Nicole, their Middle Grades Network coach, for their monthly Middle Grades team meeting. He has a stack of story problem packets in his arms to grade and he brought donuts for the team. He and Nicole greet each team member with a bright smile and a hello as they shuffle in. It's mid-October and you can feel some of the weariness that comes with the final stretch of the first quarter. Nicole plans to lead the team through a protocol to

analyze their latest Elevate data today. Mr. Burgos isn't sure how the team will respond—he knows that some of his colleagues have named they've already got too much on their plates between the "Getting to Know You" student survey they looked at earlier this year and the 5Essentials data that their principal prioritizes, along with the heavy responsibilities of teaching and managing all the things it takes to keep their school moving.

Who Is Who in the Case

Mr. Burgos: Middle Grades Team lead, 5th and 6th grade Math teacher

Ms. Coleman: Assistant Principal

Ms. Ingram: 7th and 8th grade English teacher

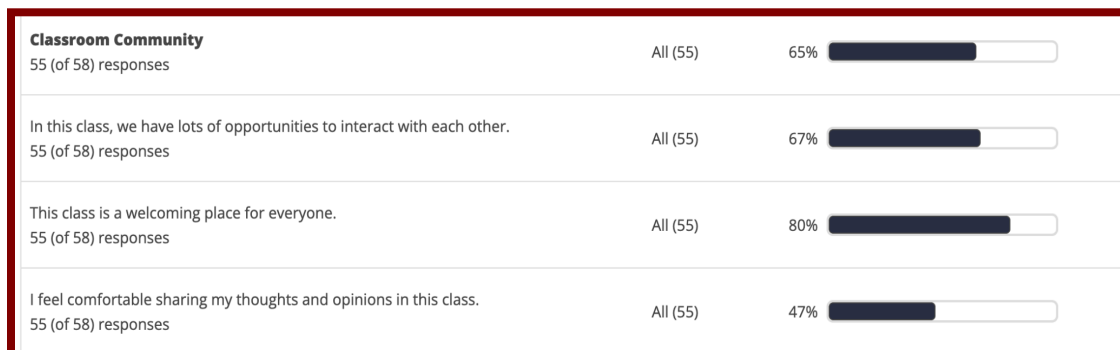
Ms. Hayes: 5th-8th grade Diverse Learning teacher

Ms. Franklin: 7th and 8th grade Science teacher

Nicole: Middle Grades Network coach

After an icebreaker and chatting over donuts, Nicole brings the team together.

"Thanks for engaging in that ice breaker! At Summer Institute, you identified wanting to continue to work on improving the learning condition of Classroom Community through things like Question of the Day. Focusing on Question of the Day seemed to have a big positive impact on improving Teacher Caring, which was our focus area last year. Last year in the Elevate survey, Classroom Community was at 48%, and we saw that students reiterated the need to focus in that area on the Getting to Know You Survey with concerns around connections with peers. Let's look at where we are now. Classroom Community is now at 65%. That's quite a significant jump. And of course it's hard to measure across years because we get new students and rosters change, but I think it's important to note places of celebration and notice the places where your change idea efforts are really working. So let's take a look at this Classroom Community data breakdown. What noticings and wonders are coming up as you look at this data?"



Ms. Ingram, the 7th and 8th grade English teacher jumps in. "For the last one, 'I feel comfortable sharing my thoughts and opinions', we have four new students in 7th grade and it's been an adjustment for them.