

Middle Grades Network

The To&Through Middle Grades Network (MGN) supports cohorts of Chicago Public Schools (CPS) dedicated to creating more equitable and responsive learning environments where middle grades students thrive. The network aims to **increase the number of students on-track in elementary school (attendance at or above 90% and GPAs at or above 3.0) through a meaningful increase in students' sense of belonging**. MGN believes that by focusing on the unique developmental needs of early adolescents, we help young people develop the foundational skills and connections to school that are critical for high school and postsecondary success.

Teams of educators at participating schools use knowledge of adolescent development research and multiple forms of data to identify a problem of practice, co-create a shared definition of student success, and partner with students to develop and test change ideas that redefine the middle grades experience.

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

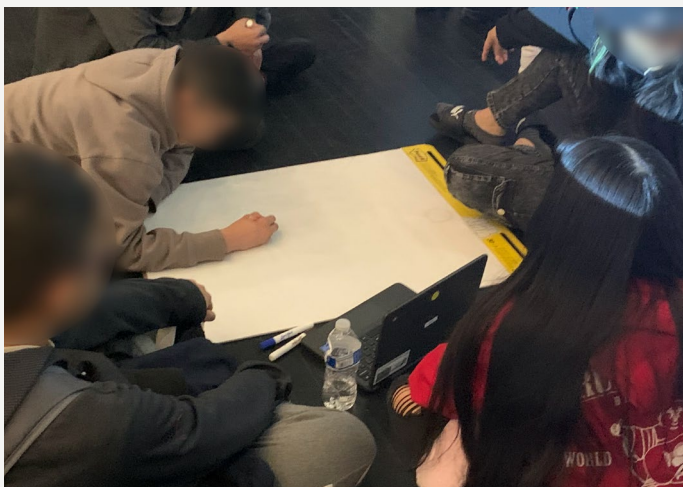
KELVYN PARK JUNIOR AND SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

Located in Hermosa



DEFINITION OF STUDENT SUCCESS

Student success is when students define their version of success with support of the people and resources at the school and build skills to have a sense of empowerment, self-efficacy, and self-advocacy to make a path to success.



STUDENTS

School Grades: **7-12**

Number of Students: **515**

Middle Grades Enrollment: **119**

DEMOGRAPHICS

Largest racial group: **87% HISPANIC**

Diverse Learners: **21%**

English Learners: **48.3%**

FRPL: **84.3%**

CORE TEAM MEMBERS

Assistant Principal | Junior High Art Teacher | Junior High Math Teacher | Junior High Diverse Learners Teacher

YEAR 1 | CHANGE IDEA RATIONALE

In spring 2022, the Kelvyn Park (KP) team conducted surveys and student shadows with their middle grades students. Analysis of this data revealed that though most students felt safe in school and connected to an adult, many students did not feel connected to what they were learning in their classes and did not perceive instruction as challenging. The staff member conducting the student shadows shared that, **“Generally students seem to ask adults for academic support rather than other students. I saw some peer-peer interactions in gym and maybe also in English but for the most part it seems like if students want clarification or feedback on their work they are more likely to ask the teacher than to ask another student.”** One student stated that, **“it’s hard to be a student here.”** The team also identified continued struggles with attendance and grades and observed differences in connectedness depending on student groups and grade levels.

DATA SOURCES

- Quarterly [Elevate](#) survey results related to the Classroom Community and Meaningful Work learning conditions.
- Staff and student surveys following KP Quest Days
- Quarterly [Elementary On Track](#) (EOT) Grades Monitoring Tool

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

- Students will rise to the occasion when given a challenge that engages them.
- Students are more reflective and full of wonder than we as educators give them credit for

YEAR 1 | CHANGE IDEA

KP Quest Days The team developed KP Quest Days, a five month experiential arts integration learning event, to build relevancy and peer relationships that focused on learning about the community and sustainability.

The theory of change is that more project-based, community-centered projects would create a shared bond between students who focus on differences rather than similarities.

YEAR 1 | IMPACT

KP Quest Days helped staff actively use student feedback to adjust teaching and scheduling to better meet students’ needs. Students also had new experiences with peers they wouldn’t otherwise have had and became more willing to work with new people and less reluctant to try new things with the support of their teachers. In Elevate, Kelvyn Park saw a **6% increase** in Classroom Community and a **7% increase** in Meaningful Work, with all learning conditions seeing positive growth by the end of the year. Specifically, they saw an **11% increase** in the amount of students who felt comfortable sharing their thoughts and opinions in class and a **7% increase** in students who felt what they were learning was connected to their real life.

End of the year survey results from the staff highlighted how the team met their goals around strengthening classroom community and peer-to-peer relationships. One staff member reflected, **“I see a lot more cross-grade friendships and talking in the hallways, and more willingness to work in groups with less conflict.”** While another noted, **“Students interacted with some students with whom they never have interacted before. Students also organically engaged in some meaningful conversations with their peers regarding specific targeted issues.”**

YEAR 2 | CHANGE IDEA RATIONALE

Building on the successes from last year's KP Quest, the KP team wanted to focus on strengthening peer to peer relationships and improving their Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) protocols to support students and improve attendance in the middle grades.

DATA SOURCES

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

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE | Throughout their journey, Kelvyn Park Junior and Senior High School educators noted their most important lessons about improving the experiences and outcomes for middle grades students.

- Students have a deep understanding of one another, and because of that we need to keep including their voices into planning.
- Continue to evaluate how to help bring students to grade level skill demonstration through further differentiation and MTSS supports.
- The better we get at KP Quest, the more students share their enjoyment of Arts Infused Projects and the intentional mixing of groups to improve peer to peer connections.

YEAR 2 | CHANGE IDEA

CHANGE IDEA #1 Improving and continuing KP Quest with Student Input

- The improved KP Quest kicked off during the second semester of the 2024-2025 school year. There were a few significant changes including: A teacher to serve as a point person and smaller group of staff members who served on a KP Quest team to help streamline planning.
- Content teachers were responsible for individual Quest Days but focused on a central theme of sustainability using the [Solutionary Framework](#).
- The MGN Student Fellows created a survey and brought the results to a team meeting with their teachers. In the survey, students identified a division between two student groups. With that feedback, teachers implemented intentional groupings during quest days which allowed for cross grade and cross cohort collaboration. With an influx of students from all over the world along with the language divide, building these connections was crucial.

CHANGE IDEA #2 On Track: Reducing [Intensive Support Group](#) by building a more intentional MTSS structure

The team implemented a [new protocol](#) in team meetings to identify students who were most in need of support, those who may need some minor adjustments to their supports, and those they were keeping an eye on.

- Using the GMT, Kelvyn Park teachers “named and claimed” students in their classes to implement more detailed intervention plans to support students with 75-89% attendance in the Intensive Support category.

YEAR 2 | IMPACT

KP Quest Days As teachers improved their planning and implementation of KP Quest, students shared increased positive feedback of enjoyment and engagement in the activities. Students were also able to better explain what they are learning or have learned from the experiences. On Elevate, Kelvyn Park saw a **3% increase** in students who agreed that teachers were making sure different backgrounds and perspectives are valued and supported, along with a **7% increase** in students feeling comfortable sharing their thoughts and opinions in class.

MTSS Structures Kelvyn Park's focus on MTSS led to increased communication and better systems in place at the team and administrative level. Using individual conversations during colloquium (a seminar or advisory type class), teachers were able to better understand what was impacting students' academics and/or attendance. This led to the student-teacher collaboration on the creation of more individualized plans on how to improve their learning and attendance. At the end of the 2023-2024 school year, 59% of students at Kelvyn Park had a GPA above 3.0, and on Elevate there was a **10% increase** in students who said that teachers know their strengths and weaknesses in class.



YEAR 3 | IMPACT

During Kelvyn Park's third year as part of the Middle Grades Network, the team focused on bringing more student voices into the KP Quest process and the school as a whole. From creating a more robust student council, to including students in Rigor Walks, to giving them more options when it comes to classes, Kelvyn Park continued to innovate around opportunities for co-creation with students. After the first KP Quest, students expressed that they would like to be a part of the planning process for future quest days. Selected students helped their science, PE, and math teachers plan and all students gave feedback through surveys and interviews.

With this continued focus on partnering with students, Kelvyn Park saw **growth in Learning Conditions data, especially Classroom Community (+5%), Affirming Identities (+3%), and Learning Goals (+3%). Student Voice increased 1%, with 73% of students agreeing with the statement, "This teacher responds to student suggestions to make our class better."** They also saw a **7% increase** in students agreeing that the school is a welcoming place and a **6% increase** in students who feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and opinions in class.

- As the Kelvyn Park team becomes an MGN alumni, they plan to sustain the work by:
- Inviting students to meetings to build robust systems for student voice.
- Embedding SEL into the day and into student learning.
- Doing deep dives into student experience data and sharing it with students to get additional feedback on potential changes.
- Strengthening equity practices to better support students furthest from opportunity.

