

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.

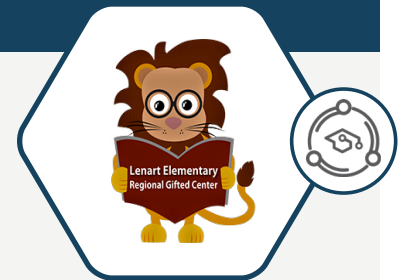
This improvement story shares the journey of one MGN school in hopes of inspiring others to reimagine systems and structures to ensure that middle grades students thrive.

LENART ELEMENTARY REGIONAL GIFTED CENTER

Located in Chatham

DEFINITION OF STUDENT SUCCESS

Student success is when students have agency and ownership over how their successes, both academic and personal, are celebrated. Students feel like they belong, are heard, and are recognized by their peers and teachers.



STUDENTS

School Grades: **PREK-8**
 Number of Students: **304**
 Middle Grades Enrollment: **85**

DEMOGRAPHICS

Largest racial group: **67.1% BLACK**
 Diverse Learners: **3%**
 Low Income: **32.2%**

CORE TEAM MEMBERS

Principal | Assistant Principal | Counselor | 6th-8th Grade Humanities Teacher | 6th-8th Grade Math Teacher
 6th-8th Grade Science Teacher

YEAR 1 | CHANGE IDEA RATIONALE

In spring 2022, the Lenart team conducted student experience surveys with their 6th-8th grade students. Survey results revealed that students felt teachers could do a better job at noticing students' challenges or knowing more about them. As a Regional Gifted Center, 5th - 8th grades students from across Chicago apply to join the accelerated instructional program at Lenart. Their unique student population led to a number of discussions and data analysis on how best to support students' sense of belonging and academic connection. With only 57% of students feeling their classes provided Meaningful Work, the team started the year by exploring different ways to make work more meaningful to students. However, throughout these discussions and based on additional student data, the team discovered that the root cause was actually building relationships through Teacher Caring.

DATA SOURCES

- Quarterly [Elevate](#) survey results related to the Teacher Caring and Meaningful Work learning conditions.
- Direct feedback through an [Elevate Data Circle](#), ["Love, Leave it, Keep it!"](#), and a [Google form](#) to gather additional data.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

- Knowing more about students helps build empathy and relationships; that is how trust is built and students know we have their best interest at heart.
- Engaging in discussion with other teachers and learning from their experiences is very helpful.
- Sometimes growth is hard to see when you're in the middle of it, but taking a step back and seeing the big picture helps.

YEAR 1 | CHANGE IDEA

Implementing Morning Meeting during Advisory

- Teachers worked to implement Morning Meeting during their 75-minute advisory period twice a week.
- Morning Meeting included Question of the Day, Inspirational Videos, a Pair-Share Topic, and Journaling.

YEAR 1 | IMPACT

The Implementation of Morning Meeting during Advisory varied depending on the grade level, but all teachers focused on consistency and fidelity. Teachers focused on ways to build deeper relationships with their students and additional engagement strategies. After the first couple of months of Morning Meeting, teachers gave a survey to gather feedback about what students liked most about the activity. Students really enjoyed the "would you rather" questions, sharing about their weekends, and hearing the opinions of their peers.

The Morning Meeting change idea led to increases in 5 out of 6 learning conditions by the end-of-year on the Elevate survey with more than 70% of students reporting positive ratings on 4 out of 6 learning conditions. The Lenart team saw the largest increase in Teacher Caring which **grew 12%** from the beginning to the end of the 2022-23 school year.

For the 2023-24 school year, the Lenart team wants to work on consistency with Morning Meeting, shortening their advisory duration (but increasing the frequency), and incorporating additional ways to build relationships outside of advisory. Teachers hope to build off of the buy-in from last year and continue to strengthen authentic connections with their students.

YEAR 2 | CHANGE IDEA RATIONALE

In fall 2023 the Lenart team decided to focus on Student Voice for the school year. The first Elevate survey conducted in September 2023 showed that 65% of students positively rated feeling that their voice was heard, they had choices, and their ideas were taken seriously. Based on these results, MGN Student Fellows conducted Elevate Data Circles in October 2023 to better understand student perspectives and inform the change idea process. Through this process the Lenart team decided to focus on improving student voice with the help of their MGN Student Fellows. As a result, teachers continued to look for opportunities to give choice in the classroom and across the middle grades. In addition, the Lenart team saw a unique opportunity to partner with the MGN Student Fellows to develop their change idea. Throughout the year the Lenart middle grades teachers incorporated student voice when discussing middle school culture, sense of belonging, and ways to improve relationships with students and teachers. Lastly, the Lenart team saw a need to build relationships between grade levels, knowing that there might be some growing pains throughout the process.

DATA SOURCES

- Quarterly [Elevate](#) survey results related to the Student Voice Learning Condition.
- Direct feedback through [Elevate Data Circles](#) to gather additional data.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE | Throughout their journey, Lenart Elementary Regional Gifted Center educators noted their most important lessons about improving the experiences and outcomes for middle grades students.

- Increased compassion, empathy, and relationships with students across grade levels — recognition that we are a “middle school.”
- Team Day has helped middle school students work together and help create a culture of connectedness with 6th-8th grade students.
- Students feel like they are listened to — even when the idea might not be able to happen.

YEAR 2 | CHANGE IDEA

CHANGE IDEA Incorporating Student Voice by Building Community**Snap a Picture**

- Student Fellows shared that they wanted their floor to be a space of self-expression. One student shared, “I don’t see anything that reminds “me” of actual students in the classroom.”
- As a result of this discussion, the Lenart team decided to take and print pictures of students throughout their school day. Student Fellows hung the pictures throughout the middle grades floor during a team meeting.

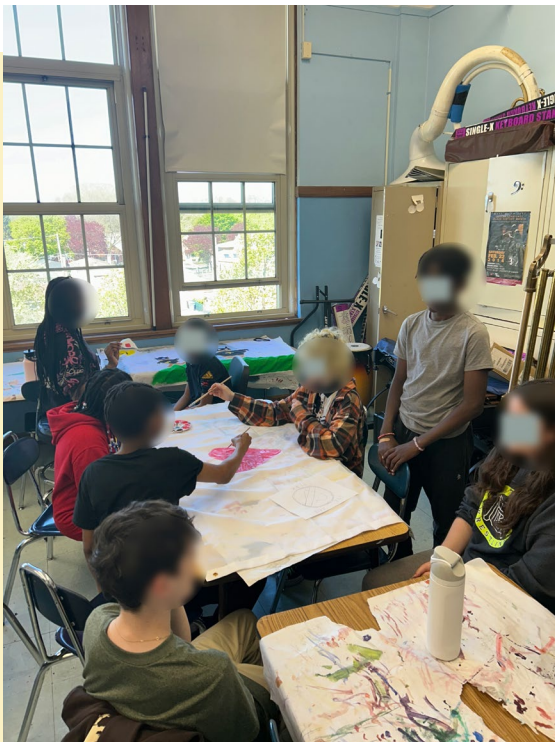
Team Day

- [Lenart Team Day](#) was co-created with the MGN Student Fellows in an effort to increase student voice in support of building relationships across the middle grades. Teachers also saw this as a unique opportunity for students’ ideas to be taken seriously.
- MGN Student Fellows shared this change idea with their peers to gather feedback about logistics, activities, and team structure.
- Teachers provided opportunities for community building with the teams prior to the event which included determining a team

YEAR 2 | IMPACT

As a result of Team Day there was a **4% increase** in the Student Voice learning condition in Elevate solidifying that students felt their ideas were taken seriously and their voices were heard. 81% of students said they enjoyed Team Day with over 60% of students stating that Team Day helped deepen relationships across the middle grades. Though there were mixed responses about creating teams across grade levels, the Lenart Team remains committed to providing opportunities for engagement within and across grade levels.

Moving forward, the Lenart team plans to continue to incorporate student voice into their daily practice and is exploring how to improve Team Day for the 2024-2025 school year. One idea is to have Team Day at the beginning of the year to support peer to peer and student-teacher relationships. They are also looking for opportunities to build on the Student Fellowship by including more students from each grade level.



YEAR 3 | IMPACT

With the arrival of new leadership, Lenart transitioned into MGN alumni status for the 2024-25 school year. Despite this change, the team lead maintained an active partnership with their MGN coach, regularly meeting to review their quarterly Grades Monitoring Tool data and explore insights from student experience surveys.

Since Lenart did not participate in the Elevate program as a whole school, the lead took initiative by administering a custom Google Form survey to her students. This survey aimed to gather targeted feedback to better understand student needs within the classroom.