

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.

PERKINS BASS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Located in Englewood



DEFINITION OF STUDENT SUCCESS

Student success is a journey that encompasses personal and academic growth, the ability to navigate challenges and adapt to changing circumstances with no fear of taking risks to achieve their mission.



STUDENTS

School Grades: **PK-8**

Number of Students: **233**

Middle Grades Enrollment: **81**

DEMOGRAPHICS

Largest racial group: **86.57% AFRICAN-AMERICAN**

Diverse Learners: **24.1%**

English Learners: **6.9%**

Economic Disadvantaged: **86%**

CORE TEAM MEMBERS

Principal | Assistant Principal | Counselor | 6th Grade ELA Teacher | 7th Grade ELA Teacher | 7th Grade Math Teacher
8th Grade Science Teacher | Middle School Diverse Learners Teachers (2)

YEAR 1 | SY25 CHANGE IDEA RATIONALE

In spring 2024, the Bass team conducted student experience surveys with all middle grades students. The data revealed significant concerns regarding peer interactions and school culture. 46% of students disagreed that their peers respected one another. 54% of students reported that bullying was a frequent issue at the school. In response to these findings, the Bass team identified a need to foster more positive student-to-student interactions. Their primary goal was to shift the school culture by equipping students with the skills and capacity for healthy, respectful interactions. To do this effectively, the team prioritized incoming 7th graders, who had experienced a lack of structured support in the previous year. The team committed to creating more intentional spaces for student discourse and relationship-building.

DATA SOURCES

- *Baseline Student Experience Survey* given to all 6th-8th-grade students in spring 2024.
- Quarterly *Elevate* Surveys given to all 6th-8th-grade students starting in fall 2024 and *Cultivate* Survey given in fall 2024 and spring 2025.
- Student feedback from MGN fellowship sessions.
- Student feedback during MGN team meetings.
- Quantitative data trends (attendance over the years)

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

- You do not always have to have a solution—trying is the most important thing!
- Trust the process!
- Using data to inform decisions can be very helpful.

CHANGE IDEA #1 | "QUESTION OF THE DAY"

- All 6th-8th grade students participated in “*Question of the Day*” during the first 15 minutes of the day in their homerooms.
- Students discussed their answers with their homeroom teachers and peers.
- Teachers hoped that “*Question of the Day*” first thing in the morning would help with attendance challenges.

CHANGE IDEA #2 | STUDENT LED DISCUSSIONS

- All 6th-8th grade homeroom teachers facilitated Student-Led Discussions in partnership with MGN Student Fellows.
- MGN Student Fellows gathered feedback from their peers and used it to determine the discussion topics most relevant to students.
- Topics explored during discussions ranged from questions like “*What is the purpose of school?*” to “*Can a trio of friends really work?*”

YEAR 1 | IMPACT

QUESTION OF THE DAY IMPACT: Ahead of SY25, the Bass team implemented “*Question of the Day*” to build early momentum around student connection and classroom culture. This daily prompt was designed to spark student engagement and peer interaction. As a result of this, their beginning of year survey data showed positive response rates of 70% or higher in all five learning conditions, signaling a strong start to the school year. This early success gave the Bass team a strong foundation to deepen their focus on student-to-student discourse and culture-building efforts.

STUDENT-LED DISCUSSIONS IMPACT: In response to student feedback and results from the *Elevate* Survey throughout the year, the Bass team also implemented Student-Led Discussions to improve peer connection. This change idea aimed to create more opportunities for students to share their thoughts and opinions about relevant topics. The survey results after this change include a **7% increase** in students feeling they had opportunities to interact with each other, a **4% increase** in students feeling their teacher responded to suggestions for improving class, and **7th-grade students** saw the highest increase in their on-track rate. A teacher reflected on the experience, sharing: “*It was incredible to see the leadership of the Student Fellow I facilitated with and how she encouraged her peers to share their thoughts and opinions.*”