

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.

JAHN SCHOOL OF FINE ARTS

Located in Roscoe Village

DEFINITION OF STUDENT SUCCESS

Student success: is when students put forth their best effort, learn from their mistakes, achieve their goals, and develop valuable skills that contribute to a happy and fulfilling life, welcoming challenges as opportunities for growth.



STUDENTS

School Grades: **PK-8**

Number of Students: **373**

Middle Grades Enrollment: **97**

DEMOGRAPHICS

Largest racial group: **51% HISPANIC**

Diverse Learners: **21%**

English Learners: **16%**

CORE TEAM MEMBERS

Principal | Assistant Principal | School Counselor | Middle School Special Education Teacher
Fine Arts + Wellness Teachers (2) | Math Teacher

YEAR 1 | 2024-2025 CHANGE IDEA RATIONALE

In spring 2024, the Jahn team gave student experience surveys to all middle grades students and conducted focus groups. Though much of the data was positive, it showed that 23% of students said that bullying was happening and 43% said that the work they received wasn't challenging. In focus groups, students shared that teachers "know my intelligence but they know little about me personally" and how challenging the work was "depends on what level you are." The students also shared that it would help if teachers did explicit team building activities to build community, used "the arts to make them think differently" and made homework more meaningful and related to the lesson. The team also saw that in SY22-23 that 36% of students were in the *Academic Support* category. All of this data led the team to conclude that they were going to implement ACES check-ins with students to better understand their needs.

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.
- ACES check-in forms and 1:1 check-ins.
- MGN team created surveys to better understand who students felt connected to in the building.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

- Consistency is imperative for change idea success.
- Check-ins alert homeroom teachers of social emotional learning issues and give students the 1:1 time they crave.
- Student Fellows can add context, which deepens the quantitative data and reminds educators that their perceptions/understandings of general student needs may be different from what the students actually feel they need.

CHANGE IDEA #1 | ACES CHECK-IN

- Weekly *ACES check-ins* were implemented to improve teacher-student relationships by providing students with feedback and giving students the opportunity to share their thoughts and opinions.
- While students completed the ACES form, teachers conferenced with students on a rotating schedule.
- Using the ACES form, students and teachers established concrete actions to follow up on.

CHANGE IDEA #2 | MOOD CHECK-IN

- The focus of the daily *mood check-in* was to provide a quick temperature check with students to identify what the overall feeling was in the classroom and which students might need extra support.
- *Mood check-ins* were typically done at the beginning of class and used by teachers to update their approach to students in real time.

YEAR 1 | IMPACT

Due to a lack of time for conferencing and inconsistency in implementation, the Jahn team changed course from the *ACES check-ins* to the daily mood check-ins. Though there was more consistency in implementation, this is still an area that Jahn is working on for the 2025-26 school year. Jahn also completed a relationship mapping survey in winter of 2025 and found that five students did not feel connected, 20% didn't feel motivated to give their best effort in class, and 25% didn't think their opinion mattered to their classmates. By spring of 2025 on *Elevate*, Jahn did see a **2% increase** in *Supportive Teaching* and a **3% increase** in *Learning Goals*. On both the *Elevate* and *Cultivate Surveys*, they also maintained strong scores in *Meaningful Work*, *Teacher Caring*, and *Classroom Community*. The team reflected that for the 2025-26 school year, the goal is to have more consistency, a better representation on the team, and elevation of students in roles of decision making.