

# 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.

## SAUCEDO STEAM MAGNET ACADEMY

Located in Little Village



### DEFINITION OF STUDENT SUCCESS

At Saucedo, students will view success beyond just their academics. They will strive for success in terms of their character and perseverance. Success will be viewed as a journey rather than a destination. Words of encouragement and appreciation will come not just from the adults but their peers.



### STUDENTS

School Grades: **PK-8**

Number of Students: **894**

Middle Grades Enrollment: **375**

### DEMOGRAPHICS

Largest racial group: **91% LATINE**

English Learners: **45%**

Economic Disadvantaged: **83%**

### CORE TEAM MEMBERS

Assistant Principal | 6th Grade Science Teacher | 6th Grade Social Studies Teacher | 7th Grade Math Teacher  
7th Grade ELA Teacher | 8th Grade Math Teacher | 8th Grade ELA Teacher | 8th Grade Science Teacher

## YEAR 1 | SY25 CHANGE IDEA RATIONALE

In spring 2024, the Saucedo team began their MGN journey by giving the MGN student experience survey and conducting student shadows and focus groups to understand the diverse experiences of their 6-8th-grade students. This initial street data revealed that students were not comfortable expressing themselves socially (community circles) or academically (class discussions). Results from the first *Elevate* Survey in fall 2025—only 48% of students felt comfortable sharing their thoughts and opinions in class and only 57% thought their teachers cared about their lives outside of school—reinforced the need to build sense of community care that would help want to come to school, feel empowered in class, and strengthen peer-to-peer and student-teacher relationships.

## DATA SOURCES

- Data from MGN *Student Experience Survey*, student shadows, and empathy interviews conducted in spring 2024.
- Classroom Community and Teacher Caring data from the *Elevate* and *Cultivate* Surveys, taken twice each in SY25.
- “*Question of the Day*” feedback form.
- Direct feedback from MGN Student Fellows and Student Leaders who lead circles and planned various grade level specific activities.
- Teacher observations and reflections shared during bi-weekly MGN team meetings.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

- Educator mindsets shifted to a more student-centered approach.
- Students need to see active willingness from educators to change their practice in order to build trust. Follow-through matters.
- Students express excitement when they have a say.

## CHANGE IDEA | COMMUNITY BUILDING ACTIVITIES

- **“Question of the Day”:** Students responded to fun questions during homeroom, designed to get them talking to students they may not normally interact with.
- **Data Circles:** Students discussed *Elevate* Survey trends monthly, to explore the reason behind the results and to brainstorm next steps.
- **Community Circles:** Students participated in get-to-know-you activities and discussions based on needs or issues they identified.
- **Grade Level Specific:** In addition to the change ideas above, each grade level team designed activities to foster a sense of community. This included 6th-grade student leaders, a 7th-grade field day, and an 8th-grade camping trip.

## YEAR 1 | IMPACT

The combination of change ideas tested by the Saucedo team led to a **4% increase** in *Teacher Caring*, improved student agency, and led to observational changes in how students interacted with one another and their teachers. Teachers observed that the opportunity to share openly using “*Question of the Day*” allowed students to build a sense of safety and community. The Data and Community Circles also created opportunities for students to have a say in their classroom experiences, strengthened their discussion skills and ability to disagree respectfully, and improved relationships overall. By the end of the school year, teachers reported that **students would reach out to peers who missed schools and were helping each other out in academic and social settings**. These learning have driven the team to think about how to increase opportunities for student voice and to build on their change ideas to continue strengthening the middle grades community at Saucedo in SY26.