

Middle Grades Network

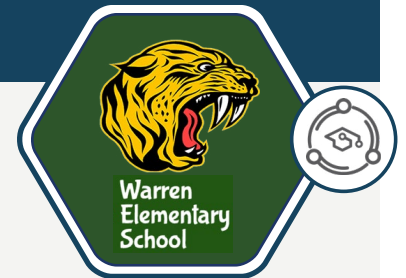
The To&Through Middle Grades Network (MGN) supports cohorts of Chicago Public Schools (CPS) dedicated to creating more equitable and responsive learning environments where middle grades students thrive. The network aims to **increase the number of students on-track in elementary school (attendance at 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.

JOSEPH WARREN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Located in Calumet Heights



DEFINITION OF STUDENT SUCCESS

Our school's definition of success is based on feeling lively and orderly. We cheer on one another at all levels (students and staff). We engage in respectful discourse at all levels and groups. Students are on task and engaged in the learning process. Students and adults have their person in which we engage in meaningful conversations to encourage a growth mindset. This discourse is encouraging and meaningful.



STUDENTS

School Grades: **PK-8**

Number of Students: **290**

Middle Grades Enrollment: **89**

DEMOGRAPHICS

Largest racial group: **96% AFRICAN-AMERICAN**

Diverse Learners: **13.7%**

English Learners: **1.4%**

Economic Disadvantaged: **84%**

CORE TEAM MEMBERS

Principal | Counselor | Middle School Math Teacher | Middle School Science Teacher
Middle School Social Science Teacher | Middle School ELA Teacher | Middle School Support Staff

YEAR 1 | SY25 CHANGE IDEA RATIONALE

In spring 2024, the Warren team conducted student experience surveys and focus groups with all middle grade students to better understand their needs and perspectives. Notably, 7th graders emerged as a group needing additional support. Survey results showed that 63% of 7th graders reported feeling bullied at school and 75% disagreed that their peers treat each other with respect. In response, the team identified the “*Question of the Day*” initiative as a promising strategy to strengthen community and elevate student voice. This daily practice creates a safe, structured space for student-to-student discourse, offering opportunities to foster respectful dialogue and practice essential life skills, such as agreeing to disagree. The initiative reflects Warren’s commitment to creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment for all students.

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.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

- Take time to let your students express themselves—they need their moment!
- Try, try, and try again! Remember to seek to understand and not assume!
- Every teacher is just as individualized as every student. Continue to understand that throughout the process.

CHANGE IDEA #1 | "QUESTION OF THE DAY"

- Warren teachers created a middle school Google Classroom for “*Question of the Day*.”
- All 6th-8th-grade students were able to share their answers to the questions virtually—similar to a live social media feed.
- Students discussed their answers with their homeroom teachers and peers.

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.
- Their first topic of discussion was “*Should students have a say in the type of work and the amount of work given in school. Yes or no, and why?*”

YEAR 1 | IMPACT

At the beginning of the 2025 school year, the Warren team observed strong student enthusiasm for the “*Question of the Day*” initiative. This engagement highlighted the need for an additional platform where students could freely share their thoughts and opinions. In response, the team implemented *Student-Led Discussions*. As one teacher remarked, “They just want to talk and they have a lot to say.” The Warren MGN Student Fellows played a key role in planning and supporting these discussions, alongside teachers. This collaboration led to high student investment in the new format. Outcomes reported include: a **14% increase** in the *Classroom Community* learning condition, a **10% increase** in the *Teacher Caring* learning condition, and the highest on-track performance during the quarter of implementation. These results underscore the positive impact of fostering student voice and peer engagement on both social-emotional learning and academic progress

