What is the To&Though Middle Grades Network?

The To&Through Middle Grades Network (MGN) is a cohort of CPS schools dedicated to creating more equitable and supportive learning environments where middle grades students thrive. The network seeks to build the capacity of practitioners to understand the developmental, social emotional, and non-academic factors critical for student success in the middle grades and to make changes to practice that improve proven middle grades indicators for success in high school and beyond including grades and attendance.

As part of the network, teams of educators participate in professional learning and receive dedicated in-school coaching as they engage in a student-centered improvement process grounded in research, data, and the collective expertise of participating schools. The improvement process includes:

- Articulating a problem of practice and corresponding change ideas to strengthen the relationships, experiences, and a sense of belonging of middle grades students;
- Designing, implementing, and iterating on a holistic strategy to address the problem of practice;
- Codifying and demonstrating promising tools and practices relevant to middle grades outcomes district-wide.

For more information about the Middle Grades Network and our current partner schools, visit:
https://toandthrough.uchicago.edu/tothrough-middle-grades-network

Benefits for Partner Schools

The core experience is designed around an improvement arch that includes four distinct phases: 1) Inquiry 2) Design 3) Iteration and 4) Sharing. Schools also receive the following benefits:

- Historical and real-time school-specific data such as high school enrollment, attendance, and GPA; college enrollment rates; and quarterly analysis of middle grades attendance and grades data.
- Weekly/bi-weekly coaching on data use, integration of research into practice, distributive leadership models, etc. and customized professional learning support for your middle school team and/ or broader educator community on topics determined in partnership with your coach.
- Opportunities to learn from and collaborate with like-minded schools from across Chicago.
- Access to and integration of the latest research on adolescent development, social-emotional learning, early warning indicators, continuous improvement, and equitable school environments.
- Support examining mindsets and restructuring systems to build more equitable spaces for young people.

At the end of the core 18-month experience, schools utilize the MGN Reflection Tool to determine customized support for up to an additional two years.
What To Expect

As part of the MGN, participating schools commit to the following. Please be sure all potential members of your MGN Team are aware of and agree to the following expectations.

**Team Coaching**
- Create an MGN team with at least five (5) members that includes the principal; a 6th, 7th, or 8th grade teacher; and the school counselor).
- Each MGN team is expected to meet once in April 2022, once in June 2022 and then bi-weekly beginning in the 2022-2023 school year.

**Individual Coaching**
- The principal will be the team lead from March 2022 - August 2022. Following the Summer Institute, the principal will identify a teacher or another educator to serve as team lead.
- Starting in September of 2022, the team lead will receive individual support from an MGN coach and lead MGN team meetings. Coaching sessions take place weekly/bi-weekly based on the coachee’s individual needs and focus on planning for MGN meetings, personal goals, and goals directly related to MGN work.

**Network Sessions**
All members of the MGN team are required to attend all six network sessions, including a one-day kick-off and the three-day summer institute. Educators receive CPDUs for each session they attend and a $500 stipend for attending the Summer Institute. *Tentative dates* are below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meeting Type</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Session Length</th>
<th>Format</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kick-Off/Network Session #1</td>
<td>March 9, 2022</td>
<td>Full-Day</td>
<td>In-Person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network Session #2</td>
<td>May 18, 2022</td>
<td>Half Day</td>
<td>Virtual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MGN Summer Institute</td>
<td>August 2 - 5, 2022</td>
<td>Four Days</td>
<td>In-Person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network Session #3</td>
<td>November 2022</td>
<td>Half Day</td>
<td>Virtual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network Session #4</td>
<td>February 2023</td>
<td>Half Day</td>
<td>In-Person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network Session #5</td>
<td>April 2023</td>
<td>Half Day</td>
<td>Virtual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network Session #6</td>
<td>June 2023</td>
<td>Half Day</td>
<td>Virtual</td>
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School and Team Members Expectations

- Principal is willing to cover the cost of subs, as needed, for each MGN network session during the school year so practitioners can fully participate in the network;
- Commitment to identifying, developing, and testing change ideas focused on improving student belonging, GPA and attendance.
- Thoughtfully include and center students in the MGN work;
- Using qualitative and quantitative data tools developed by and recommended by the To&Through Project at your school to support network learning and efficacy;
- Willingness to share data and problems of practice with other schools in the MGN;
- Participation in site visits to other MGN schools to build community and deepen your learning; and
- Quarterly, in-person visits from your MGN coach to see change ideas in action. This includes providing access to classrooms, meetings, resources, and staff needed to support the MGN team’s work.

Next Steps

- By January 14 | Complete the Middle Grade Network Application form.
- January 18 - 28 | The To&Through Team will visit selected schools for a 60-90-minute site visit and interview prospective members of your MGN Team.
- By February 9 | Schools will be notified if they have been selected to join the cohort.
- By February 25 | Signed MOU due by initial site visit from your MGN Coach.

Contact Information

If you have any questions about the application, please contact Ashley N. Leonard, Associate Director - To&Through Middle Grades Network at aleonard3@uchicago.edu. You may also visit https://toandthrough.uchicago.edu/tothrough-middle-grades-network to learn more about MGN and the work of previous cohorts.
Application Questions

We recommend compiling responses with potential members of the Middle Grade Network Team and copy/pasting into the Application Form once you are ready to submit. Your responses should be 3-4 sentences MAXIMUM.

General Questions
- Are you a Success Bound School (Y/N)
- How many STUDENTS do you have in each of your middle grades? How many TEACHERS?

Interests and Potential Focus Area
1. Why do you want your school to be part of the Middle Grades Network (MGN)?
2. To what extent do your middle grade students currently feel a sense of belonging at your school? How do you know?

MGN Team + School Structures
3. List the full names and roles of the five educators who will be part of the MGN Team at your school? The team must include 1) the principal 2) at least one 5th - 8th grade teacher, and 3) school counselor).
4. Why were these individuals chosen to be on the MGN Team? List each person’s name and a brief rationale for their participation on the MGN Team.
5. Who was involved in completing this application? Include individuals who contributed content, were consulted, or were responsible for completion.
6. Briefly describe the team meeting structures in your school and tools for collaboration. Include the frequency, length, and who is involved in existing meetings or other team structures.
7. What is the best day and time for the MGN Team to meet? You are not committing to this time now but it will help us plan coaching support.

School Capacity and Readiness
8. Briefly describe your current school-wide CIWP goals and how they connect to the middle grades. How do you see these goals evolving in the 2022-2023 school year? This question will help us understand how the MGN can support existing work at your school or work you plan to engage in in the near future. Feel free to discuss current goals only if SY20-21 goals have not been set yet.
9. Briefly describe how social emotional learning (SEL) is implemented in the middle grades. Include the curricula used and any other helpful information.
10. Briefly describe your grading practices for middle grade?
11. How do you plan to share learnings from the MGN with teachers & staff who are not on the MGN Team?
12. Briefly describe the data points and/or sources used most frequently at your school. Why and how are these data sources useful?
13. Briefly list/describe the other external partnerships at your school. Consider your primary partners, length of the partnership, and how the partnership supports the overall work of your school.