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

Practitioners from selected schools participate in customized professional learning and receive dedicated in-school coaching as they engage in a student-centered improvement process grounded in data, research, and the expertise of participating schools. The ultimate goal of the MGN is to build school capacity and develop best practices for middle grades success that can be implemented district-wide.

The pilot cohort of MGN schools is focused on developing and testing solutions related to the following problem of practice: “Our students and families do not always feel they belong in our school communities because of school and societal barriers caused by systemic racial/ethnic injustice and exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and remote learning. As adults, we need to create caring and equitable relationships where middle school students and families are seen, valued, and engaged.”

**01 INQUIRY**

Collect, analyze, and use quantitative and qualitative data to better understand the experiences of middle grades students.

**02 DESIGN**

Articulate a problem of practice and develop a strategy to address that problem.

**03 ITERATION**

Conduct quarter-long cycles of improvement to test solutions to the identified problem of practice.

**04 SHARING**

Shift focus outward so that others can learn how to better support middle grades students.
Intentional Relationship Building to Strengthen Student-Educator Relationships

LOCATION
Brighton Park
3825 S. Washtenaw Avenue
Chicago, IL 60632

STUDENTS
School Grades: PreK - 8
Number of Students: 331

DEMOGRAPHICS
93.1% Hispanic
14.8% Diverse Learners
48% English Learners

INQUIRY
In spring 2020, the Brighton Park team conducted surveys and focus groups with their middle grades students. Focus groups revealed that students felt teachers did not check for understanding frequently enough, that students generally did not feel connected to adults at the school, and that students did not have a strong sense of identity. School level outcome data also indicated that the transition to fifth grade, when students begin to interact with multiple teachers per day, was particularly challenging.

DESIGN
Using this data, Brighton Park identified their middle grades problem of practice and their first change idea to test in the fall of 2020.

- **Problem of Practice**: “Our students are struggling with academic engagement and executive functioning skills, as well as struggling to connect with peers and staff. These challenges are exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and remote learning. As a result, we need to provide opportunities for students to develop purposeful and meaningful relationships with adults that support their executive functioning skills in order to increase their academic engagement and success.”

- **Change Idea**: Brighton Park designed their change idea around implementing bi-weekly individual student check-ins with their 41 fifth grade students. Twice per month, fifth-grade Brighton Park students will also meet with a teacher to discuss how they are doing at home and in their classes to set clear goals for the next two weeks.

- **CPS Continuous Improvement Work Plan (CIWP) Priority**: Quality and Character of School Life: Student Voice, Engagement and Civic Life

ITERATION
Brighton Park will use three metrics to determine if their change idea is having its intended impact:

- Bi-weekly pulse check surveys to measure student-teacher connections;
- Traditional engagement metrics, like attendance and work completion, to understand how bi-weekly check-ins impact academic performance; and
- Teacher-created qualitative assessments to measure executive functioning.