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.

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**Inquiry**

During spring 2020, the Drake team surveyed rising 7th and 8th graders about their needs and experiences as middle grade students. The surveys revealed that students needed more academic support, such as tutoring, and emphasized the importance of relationships and mentors. Students also expressed a desire for their voices to be heard in school decisions. School level data highlighted disparities in academic performance and school discipline between boys and girls as well, a trend aligned with the district’s focus on young Black men.

**Design**

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

- **Problem of Practice**: “Due to societal barriers caused by systemic racial injustice and exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and remote learning, our middle grades students are struggling to consistently engage. We need to model a sense of urgency and develop strong, consistent, and flexible relationships, supports, and training with students and their families.”
- **Change Idea**: Drake will develop interest-based instructional and extracurricular activities to strengthen 1:1 and mentoring relationships between middle school boys and Drake educators. The Drake team will implement their first change idea with Black male students in 6th-8th grade.
- **CPS Continuous Improvement Work Plan (CIWP) Priority**: Quality and Character of School Life: Student Voice, Engagement, and Civic Life

**Iteration**

Drake will use a variety of metrics to iterate on and measure the effectiveness of their change idea including:

- Student and teacher completion rates for the “Getting to Know You” questionnaire;
- Participation rate of male students in interest/skill-based extracurricular activities;
- Pulse check surveys daily with male students and bi-weekly for all middle grades students;
- 3-8 On-Track OR Behavior, Attendance and Grades (BAG) reports as a baseline metric and monitored bi-weekly; and
- A social-emotional learning (SEL) metric developed with social workers to determine the quality of peer to peer interactions.