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.”

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

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

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

- **SHARING**
  Shift focus outward so that others can learn how to better support middle grades students.
Elevating Student Voice to Build Student-Educator Relationships

LOCATION
Gage Park
5250 S. Rockwell Street
Chicago, IL 60632

STUDENTS
School Grades: PreK – 8
Number of Students: 1,023

DEMOGRAPHICS
98.3% Hispanic
16.2% Diverse Learners
42.1% English Learners

INQUIRY
In spring 2020, Nightingale analyzed quantitative outcome data for their middle grade students and conducted surveys with students and parents. They learned that students wanted their voices to be included in the decision-making process around academic instruction and that most students struggled with engagement in remote learning despite strong connections to adults. School-level data also indicated that attendance for middle school girls was lower than for middle school boys.

DESIGN
Using these data, Nightingale identified their middle grades problem of practice, along with their first change idea to test in the fall of 2020.

• Problem of Practice: “Our middle grades students are facing unprecedented levels of insecurity and developmental changes. As a result, we will begin the 2020–21 school year focused on developing a strong sense of student belonging by strengthening student-educator relationships through an established system of tiered supports.”

• Change Idea: Nightingale launched a Student Voice Committee (SVC) that met alongside the MGN team to co-create surveys and provide feedback on how to bridge and strengthen relationships between staff and students. The Student Voice Committee had representation from each of the middle grades (fifth through eighth) to gather more representative data about the concerns of all middle grades students.

• CPS Continuous Improvement Work Plan (CIWP) Priority: Structures for Continuous Improvement: Leadership and Collective Responsibility
ITERATION
Starting in September 2021, Nightingale launched a SVC. They focused on four classrooms, one from each middle grade, to recruit students for this committee.

ACTIONS
• The SVC met weekly and, in partnership with the MGN team, analyzed data, made recommendations, and helped with planning in the hopes of seeing an increase in attendance, engagement, and facetime from students during virtual learning.
• The Nightingale staff also implemented regular pulse check surveys to understand the social-emotional learning needs of their students.

INSIGHTS
• With the creation of the SVC, all students could see their feedback implemented directly into classes.
• The SVC provided students with leadership opportunities, which they were able to put into practice both inside and outside of the committee.
• The MGN team and SVC elicited feedback from teachers about students’ engagement in virtual learning with the goal of an increase in more positive feedback over time.

LEARNING
• There must be support from administrators and buy-in from staff to truly listen to and incorporate student feedback.
• To sustain the SVC, there must be regular SVC meetings and a feedback loop between the SVC and their peers and the SVC and the school staff.
• Schools must remember to show students how their voice has influenced the decision making process.

NEXT STEPS
• Moving forward, the Nightingale team will use the SVC to increase the level of impact their students’ voices have on decision making.
• Nightingale will also continue to collect and use qualitative and quantitative data to make changes everywhere, from instruction to school climate.