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.”
Zoom Family Socials to Strengthen School-Family Partnerships

LOCATION

Woodlawn
6300 S. University Avenue
Chicago, IL 60637

STUDENTS

School Grades: 6 - 12
Number of Students: 624

DEMOGRAPHICS

93.6% Black
13.9% Diverse Learners
73.1% Low Income

INQUIRY

During spring 2020, the UCCS Woodlawn (UCW) team conducted student focus groups, exit interviews with 8th graders, and empathy interviews with families. Overall, students felt a strong sense of community but often struggled to deepen their relationships in positive ways. Feedback from families revealed a desire for a stronger community amongst parents and families as well as more ways to connect with teachers and staff. They felt this support and consistent family engagement were even more important given the developmental changes their middle schoolers are experiencing. A review of historical data confirmed that this was a consistent request from UCW families.

DESIGN

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

• Problem of Practice: “UCW has failed to create and preserve authentic relationships with our students’ families that support student success.”

• Change Idea: UCW will host Family Zoom Socials with 6th grade families to build relationships amongst families and between families and teachers. Additionally, 7th and 8th grade teachers will regularly participate in Family, Teacher, Community Organization (FTCO) meetings. UCW will focus their change idea on the 6th grade in order to establish authentic community relationships that empower teachers, students, and their families to equally invest in and support student success at each stage of the UCW experience.

ITERATION

UCW will use the following metrics to iterate on and measure the effectiveness of their change idea:

• Regular tracking of Zoom social participation, phone calls, and in-person contacts with students’ parents/caregivers across all staff in the school;
• Exit surveys of parents to gather feedback about the effectiveness of each Zoom social;
• Pulse checks surveys with parents to gather wider data about how parents feel about the Zoom social experience; and
• Pulse check surveys for 6th graders accompanied by a quarterly debrief.