

**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 thrive. The network aims to *increase the number of students with attendance at or above 90% and GPAs at or above 3.0 through a meaningful increase in students' sense of belonging.*

Since February of 2020, schools in the pilot cohort have worked to redefine the middle grades experience by using qualitative and quantitative data to understand student experiences, develop a problem of practice, and test change ideas that positively impact the experiences and outcomes of middle grades students.

This profile shares the journey of one MGN school in hopes of inspiring others to reimagine systems and structures to ensure middle grades students thrive.

## JOHN B. DRAKE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LOCATED IN THE DEARBORN HOMES



### SY2021-22 TEAM MEMBERS

- Principal
- Assistant Principal
- School Counselor
- Social Worker
- 6th-8th Grade Math, Science, and Reading Teachers
- Two Diverse Learning Teachers

# Drake Elementary School Year One Improvement Story

## YEAR ONE

## CHANGE IDEA RATIONALE

During spring 2020 when students were remote learning due to the pandemic, the Drake team surveyed rising seventh and eighth 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.

In addition, [historical school-level data](#) surfaced consistent disparities in academic performance and school discipline between boys and girls - 49% of girls were on track, compared to only 27% of boys. This was reinforced during focus groups when male students shared that they want academic success but need assistance getting there. Based on this data and the district's focus on Black male students, Drake's target group became 6th - 8th grade boys.

### STUDENTS

**School Grades:** PreK - 8

**Number of Students:** 263

**Middle Grades Enrollment:** 85

### DEMOGRAPHICS

**94.7%** Black

**18.3%** Diverse Learners

**92.4%** Low Income

### Data Sources

- **Male Mentoring Tracker** that included session length, attendees, topics discussed, and areas for support;
- **Elementary On-Track data** (i.e. grades and attendance) reviewed during bi-weekly MGN team meetings; and
- **Student Experience Survey** given to all 6th - 8th grade students in February and June 2021.

## YEAR ONE

## CHANGE IDEA

### Male Mentoring Program

- All 6th - 8th grade young men were matched with a male teacher or staff member.
- Small groups of 3-4 students met with their mentor weekly during SY2020 & SY2021.
- Special events were held for the participating male students including a book club that culminated in an event where students met the author.
- The goal of the change idea was to strengthen student-educator relationships and improve academic outcomes.

## YEAR ONE

## IMPACT

While there was not an immediate increase in academic achievement or attendance because of the Male Mentoring Program, results from the end of year student experience survey showed that student-educator relationships improved. As a result, the team decided to continue the male mentoring program in SY22 to see if grades and attendance improved once all students returned in person in the fall.

# Drake Elementary School

## Year Two Improvement Story

### YEAR TWO

### CHANGE IDEA RATIONALE

After reviewing data from the SY21 school year, the team noticed a new trend - all 5th grade students struggled with the transition to the middle grades at Drake. On the To&Through Elementary Tool, they saw that 6th grade GPAs were lower than those of 7th and 8th graders. Given the small number of middle school students, Drake decided to expand their scope to focus on all rising 6th graders and all 7th and 8th graders. The team also wanted to continue to strengthen student-educator relationships as students returned to the building for the first time since the pandemic.

### Drake's Definition of Student Success

Successful students at Drake are actively engaged in their classroom learning and in at least one extra-curricular program; belong to and contribute to the Drake family; and are on-track with at least a 2.5 GPA and 95% attendance (resulting in at least a 70% on-track rate).

### Data Sources

- **Elevate survey** highlighted the need to focus change ideas on Teacher Caring and Classroom Community.
- **Focus Groups** were held with male students in November 2021 and February 2022. Focus groups informed the continuation of the male mentoring program and the team's change ideas.
- **Grades Monitoring Tool** that includes visualizations of trends in GPAs, grades data, and attendance at the school or grade level and for specific student groups, was used to monitor on-track rates and to identify students in need of additional support.
- **KidTalk Protocol** used to increase communication across the middle grades team about the needs of individual students who required extra support.

### YEAR TWO

### CHANGE IDEAS

#### Shadow Days

- 5th grade students participated in a mini lesson in each core subject, received letters and videos from teachers, and interviewed their older peers to experience what to expect in the middle grades.
- The goal was to make the transition to middle grades smoother.

#### **One-on-One Conferences**

- All 6th - 8th grade students discussed their grades, attendance, behavior data, and strengths with a middle grades teacher to improve relationships + outcomes.
- Additional 10-15 minute conferences were held for students at risk of failing during the fourth quarter, with the goal of providing 1:1 support to students.
- The team developed a [script for all students](#) and another version for those in need of more intensive [academic support](#). The scripts served as a guide but teachers had the flexibility to adjust as needed.

# Drake Elementary School Year Two Improvement Story

## YEAR TWO

## IMPACT

**Shadow Days** allowed teachers to establish relationships with rising middle grade students and helped provide clarity on areas for alignment in the curriculum between 5th + 6th grades. As a result, Drake plans to hold Shadow Days for rising 6th graders each March.

**One-on-One Conferences** were impactful for both teachers and students. 6th - 8th grade students' perceptions of Teacher Caring on the Elevate survey improved 5% between the beginning and end of the school year. Drake also saw their overall On-Track rates improve 9% between Q2 and Q3 when the conferences were held. Perhaps most importantly, students reported that the conferences helped them see teachers as real people, motivating them to put in more effort in class. As a result, Drake plans to hold one-on-one conferences three times in the SY23 school year for all 6th - 8th grader students.

In addition, Drake saw the attendance of middle grades males improve throughout the year and noticed that all middle grades students took more ownership over their learning. The team hopes that these improvements will begin to show more clearly in students academic outcomes in the SY23 school year and beyond.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

**Throughout their two and a half year journey, Drake educators noted their most important lessons about improving the experiences and outcomes of middle grades students:**

- 01** Schools can manage differences in student and teacher perceptions by developing strong relationships and encouraging open communication.
- 02** Schools need to be intentional about highlighting students' strengths. This aspect of the 1:1 conference was the most powerful for teachers and students alike.
- 03** Improving student-teacher relationships increases students' sense of self advocacy (i.e. proactively asking to redo assignments) and helps them see teachers as a resource.

