LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

As I look over the stories of this past year, only a few of which we have room to recount here, I am reminded of what it is that makes Middle Grades Partnership so important and also of what makes it truly different. One difference: rather than dictate a set curriculum for all of our partnerships, we set ambitious goals for our students and empower our teachers to devise innovative ways to help our students reach those goals. In this report, we have two very different examples. In the first, a team of teachers designs curricula to address specific identified needs with astounding results, documenting summer learning gains over past summer losses. In the other, instructors surprise their students with an elaborate ‘real-life’ mystery scenario that intrigues and challenges them to use what they know, learn what they must and to collaborate with one another to solve the ‘crime’.

Between them is a visionary donor as the lynchpin. By supporting Middle Grades Partnership, Dr. Carlessia Hussein realizes her goal of breaking down barriers and leveling opportunity for young African American and Latino men. Because of her generosity, boys from City Springs Elementary Middle and Boys’ Latin learn side by side, growing academically while forming deep friendships that cross lines of race and class.

Middle Grades Partnership empowers students, teachers and donors to change our city for the better, maximizing what every member of the family brings to the organization.

Thank you for supporting Middle Grades Partnership.

Wendy Samet
Executive Director
Middle Grades Partnership serves nine public and private school partnerships. We provide year-round academic programming for over 450 middle school students each year.

Afya & Park
City Springs (boys) & Boys’ Latin
City Springs (girls) & Garrison Forest
Cross Country & Bryn Mawr
Hamilton & Calvert
Hampstead Hill & Friends
Lillie May Carroll Jackson & Roland Park Country
Mount Royal & McDonogh
Southwest Baltimore Charter & Gilman
FACTS AND FIGURES

Since 2005, Middle Grades Partnership has served more than 3,400 Baltimore City middle school students.

Our attendance rate is 85% – which is remarkable for a voluntary summer program. Even more impressive, most of our students get up very early to catch a public bus to their home school in time to board another bus to the partnership site.

Experience in Middle Grades Partnership makes our students four times more likely to attend competitive, academically rigorous public high schools than their non-Middle Grades Partnership peers.

Last year, 86% of our rising ninth graders were accepted into the top competitive public high schools. Note that the citywide average for student acceptance into these same high schools last year was 19%.

Our three-year student retention rate is 78%.

Of all Middle Grades Partnership students, 78% identify as Black, 13% White, 8% Hispanic, 1% Asian or other.
2017 FINANCIAL SUMMARY
January 1, 2017 - December 31, 2017

REVENUE
Contributions from public and private schools $157,000
Contributions from individuals, corporations and foundations $860,439
TOTAL REVENUE $1,017,439

EXPENSES
Programs $661,157
Operations $355,575
TOTAL EXPENSES $1,016,732

WHAT IT TAKES...

90 TEACHERS AND STAFF $513,863
DAILY TRANSPORTATION $64,281
COLLEGE VISITS/FIELD TRIPS $10,216
MATERIALS/SUPPLIES/FOOD $72,797
TOTAL $661,157
Math students in Ms. Blymiller’s class
This fall was a milestone for Southwest Baltimore Charter School math teacher Eve Blymiller. After years of MAP (Measure of Academic Progress) test scores documenting summer learning regression she watched her Middle Grades Partnership students’ test scores rise. Blown away by the data, Blymiller (or Mrs. B. as her students call her) contacted all the student’s families and found none of the children had ever attended any sort of organized academic programing over the summer. Of the eleven students she had this summer all showed academic growth. “Every year prior that we have data shows these kids leave us in the spring and their scores in the fall are lower because they didn’t do anything academic in the summer,” she said. “This is the first year we didn’t have regression and I can say that’s because of Middle Grades Partnership.”

As fifth graders, Blymiller recruited students for the summer program because she wanted to track their progress over Middle Grades Partnership’s three years. MAPs testing at the end of the school year determined where her students’ academic gaps were – algebra, geometry and grammar. “I wanted to have the kids I was already teaching to see the different ways I could connect with them over the summer. Normally, I wouldn’t have the ability to do that,” said Blymiller.

Armed with this data, Blymiller and Gilman School Director Donell Thompson developed a math and grammar curriculum for summer that targeted students’ academic weaknesses. In addition to drilling down on math concepts (which is their background) the directors recruited a Gilman grammar specialist to work with students. This was the first time those students ever had five weeks of straight grammar instruction. “They aren’t getting it in elementary school. They aren’t getting it during the school year. They are getting it over the summer from Middle Grades Partnership and the test score improvements speak for themselves,” said Blymiller.
With more than 50 years under her belt helping patients navigate the health-care system for better health outcomes, Dr. Carlessia Hussein wanted to apply those same skills to help young boys in Baltimore City navigate the education system. “As a public health professional, I saw jurisdictional disparities in health and race across the state. Those same disparities between wealthy and poor are easily visible in education,” she said.

Most of Dr. Hussein’s career as a health equity expert focused on solving problems from the top down. In her retirement, she wanted to try a new approach to improve individual lives by reaching people from the bottom up. She decided to financially support a program that would reach academically struggling black and Latino boys who can be overlooked by society. “Often times those at the lower end are given up on,” she reflected. “People outside of their communities tend to look at them with authority instead of compassion and understanding. That can set them on the wrong path.”

When Dr. Hussein learned about Middle Grades Partnership through the Baltimore Community Foundation she knew she’d found a match. She was able to meet with the City Springs Director Kenji Jackson, visit the school and see students in the classroom. Having that connection to the students and personally seeing her investment in their future was what she was seeking. “With Middle Grades Partnership they have access to diverse communities outside of their normal network,” she said. “At the time we are reaching them, they are still formulating who they are and how they think about themselves. It can make all the difference.”

By sponsoring four students in the City Springs / Boys’ Latin partnership at the middle school level, Dr. Hussein hopes to change their trajectory. With increased opportunities she wants to see the cycle of generational poverty broken. “We are all in this together,” she noted. “This program gives them a step stool to look over the barriers and correct inequality.”
In a science class on forensics, a Baltimore County police officer provided real-life tips on what to look for and how to avoid contaminating a scene, conduct an interview and collect fingerprints.
When McDonogh alum Rachel Cooper returned for her sixth year as an Middle Grades Partnership intern, she brought a forensics mystery for students to solve: the fictional disappearance of her fellow intern (and younger sister) Julia.

Mount Royal science instructor Jade Hughes and Cooper created a forensics puzzle to challenge students’ problem-solving skills. With the rise in popularity of forensics-based TV shows, students had a general idea of what was involved in crime scene investigation. But this project let students become part of the story.

Cooper picked Julia as the victim because, she explained, “We wanted someone that the students knew. It helped the problem feel more personal and gave them clues about who they should talk to and question about her disappearance.”

Students were provided with a short bio of Julia, a list of possible interview subjects, and were able to see her staged “office” to get started. Each student chose a role to play: evidence collection and crime scene analysis, fingerprinting, or interviewing. Suspects and witnesses were placed around campus and were available for student investigators to question.

Students were able to focus on what interested them in the investigative process, but all had to work together to solve the crime.

“You have quiet kids who were piping up with theories. We gave clues that allowed other kids to get involved,” said Cooper. “It really built cooperation because you have to do your job so that everyone can thrive. It’s as real world as we can make a classroom environment.”

So, what happened to Julia? Middle Grades Partnership students solved the crime in the three days allotted by identifying where she’d been held in a closet by a cheating student after she confronted him about his plagiarism.

Cooper was thrilled with the outcome. “This was one of those projects that everyone just gets really excited about. They were high-fiving and cheering when they solved the crime.”
THANK YOU

On behalf of our students, teachers, and board, we thank all those who contributed in 2017 for making a difference in the lives of Baltimore City middle school youth.

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Find out more about all of the Middle Grades Partnerships on our website at www.middlegradespartnership.org

Middle Grades Partnership is an initiative of the Baltimore Community Foundation.

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To arrange a site visit to see Middle Grades Partnership in action please contact:

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