LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

What a year it has been! Seeing our students and teachers persevere and even thrive despite the requirements of a virtual summer I witnessed remarkable teaching and great perseverance on the part of our students. Not daunted by these challenges we were able to serve 311 students across eight partnerships with a daily attendance rate of 91%. Unbelievable! Middle Grades Partnership was and is a safe place for our communities to discuss, explore and give context to what our students witnessed on the news or in their own communities. This year has tested the meaning of “place” as we have been kept physically apart from one another. At the same time, this year has crystallized the importance of what we do, both in terms of building academic strengths and in sustaining deep, crucial relationships across the boundaries of race, beliefs, and socio-economic class.” Middle Grades Partnership creates community out of diversity and strength from adversity. Thank you for being a part of this work in a year that has tested us all.

Wendy Samuel
Middle Grades Partnership serves eight public and private school partnerships. We provide year-round academic programming for over 500 middle school students each year.

- The Belair-Edison School & Park
- City Springs & Boys’ Latin
- Cross Country & Bryn Mawr
- Hamilton & Calvert
- Hampstead Hill & Friends
- Lillie May Carroll Jackson & Roland Park Country
- Mount Royal & McDonogh
- Southwest Baltimore Charter & Gilman
Since 2005, Middle Grades Partnership has served more than 4,500 Baltimore City middle school students. Our attendance rate is 91% - which is remarkable for a voluntary summer program. While our students did not come together in person, we still planned an engaging and exciting summer program for our middle school students. We connected with our students virtually, reinforcing critical relationships between students and their teachers, mentors, and friends.

In 2020, 73% of our rising ninth graders were accepted into top competitive public high schools. Another 9% were accepted into Baltimore School for the Arts, parochial or private schools. Note that citywide, 22% of students were accepted into the top academic criteria public high schools last year. Middle Grades Partnership provided virtual summer programming for 311 students in eight public and private school partnerships.

Of all Middle Grades Partnership students, 70% identify as Black/African American, 14% White, 7% Latino, 3% Asian and 6% other. Female students comprised 64% of our students while 36% were male. Of these students, 59% of them returned from the previous year.
Middle Grades Partnership saw an increase in supplemental support from corporations and foundations in 2020 and a decrease in expenses in food and transportation due to virtual programming. Our school partners remain financially committed and our financial picture is strong.
Too many Black Americans have died, among them most recently Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, and George Floyd. We, the board and staff of Middle Grades Partnership, are in mourning and stand in solidarity with a mourning community over the recent violence and the inherently racist systems at the root of that violence. When that violence is caused by those charged to serve and protect, we must come together to demand justice.

We at Middle Grades Partnership are committed to working together to heal and fix broken systems. We strive to empower our students to become the next generation of leaders and healers. As the events of the viral pandemic compound the epidemic of brutality and inequality that separates communities, Middle Grades Partnership serves to create friendships and experiences that bridge zip codes and school mascots, creating shared community across divides that adults often fail to cross. We are proud of the work our students do. Through Middle Grades Partnership they are taking responsibility for their world in specific ways: combating gun violence (Lillie May Carroll Jackson Public Charter School and Roland Park Country School), tackling food insecurity (Southwest Baltimore Charter School and Gilman School), addressing teen depression (Mt. Royal Elementary/Middle and McDonogh School), and investigating the history of public housing (City Springs Elementary Middle and Boys’ Latin) among other projects. Our students learn to lead and take positive action and we need that now more than ever.

We acknowledge the systemic racism inherent in our country and we are committed to actively engaging in the work needed to create an equitable and inclusive society. Our board’s Race, Equity, and Inclusion Task Force was created last year to ensure our actions align with our values and that all voices are sought out and welcomed in this ongoing process.

As part of our work moving forward, we are connecting with our site directors and faculty members in a series of conversations that will allow us to listen to and learn from our community. We pledge to establish an active, antiracist, culturally responsive approach throughout all aspects of the Middle Grades Partnership program.

There is so much uncertainty and isolation caused by the pandemic, but we stand united as a community. Black Lives Matter.
2020 High School Acceptances

On average, Middle Grades Partnership students are more than **THREE times more likely** to be accepted into Baltimore City’s criteria-entrance high schools than the average Baltimore City student.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Percentage of Baltimore City students accepted</th>
<th>Percentage of Middle Grades Partnership students accepted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baltimore City College</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baltimore Polytechnic</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Dunbar</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>22%</strong></td>
<td><strong>73%</strong></td>
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In an extraordinary year, with over 300 students participating, COVID-19 didn’t stop our summer program. In 2020, 91% percent of our middle schoolers attended lessons daily. We saw exceptional student engagement from Middle Grades Partnership students during this unique summer.

Attendance is a key indicator of academic success, and our students get top marks. While our eight partnerships were virtual this summer, our “A” attendance rate tells us that students value the specialized academics and program quality that Middle Grades Partnership offers. Students built community with their peers from partner schools and broadened their worldview, all while maintaining ties with their home school teachers during this socially distant time.
Our chosen theme was short and sweet: Brave New Voices, with the idea that the experiences this summer would push our girls beyond their comfort zones—academically, socially, and otherwise. We had no idea how correct we would be!

Learning from home magnified inequities across race, class, and ability more starkly than before. Also, COVID-19 caused major job loss, reduction of hours, or the addition of many more hours for parents who are essential workers. Parents that may have been incredibly motivated to work with their kids during the school year were preoccupied with other stressors. This says nothing of the mental toll that this has taken; scholars came to us this summer after three months of computer-based learning and even further across the spectrum of needs than they may have ordinarily been. We knew we needed to pivot from our physical programming model to give girls what they needed during this unprecedented summer.

Our Math Lab and Solutions Squad (science-based design and engineering) classes both had a co-teaching model with staff from both schools, which succeeded in not only pulling standardized test scores and anecdotal data to see what specifically our scholars needed to be challenged with, but also in having a voice to speak to what girls from LMCJ and RPCS wanted from their academics this summer. In Solutions Squad, our students did
Sage (7th)

Goals:
- Make honor roll for both semesters
- Improve in Chinese

Things I like right now:
1. Disney+
2. Fuller House
3. Watermelon
4. Jewelry
5. Dogs
6. Dancing

Art
I enjoyed designing our flags in art class!

Math
I enjoyed doing brain teasers, they were challenging but also really fun.

Writer’s Studio
I enjoyed writing a personal narrative.

Planet Fitness
I enjoyed learning new stretches.

Solution Squad
I enjoyed building and designing our own parachutes.
Emily (7th)

My goals for next year:
- Improve my handwriting
- Find better ways to study
- Expand my word choice

- I liked doing the skin care in Solutions Squad
- I liked doing the workout dances in Dance
- I liked doing the flag design in Art
- I liked doing the “I Am” poem in Writing
- I liked doing the puzzles in Math
- I liked group reading in Book Club

Covid 19 taught me, that sometimes you need to slow life down, instead of it going fast, and expected.

I enjoy drawing, and watching Avatar since it’s on Netflix now.

This is an oat and honey mask that I made in Solutions Squad.
design challenges that included self-care, which is an important skill to keep in mind and something that we as adults have to remember to incorporate as well. In Writer’s Studio, girls got to express themselves through the written word in styles such as narrative, blogging, and poetry, and the bravery of being a child during COVID-19 has manifested through their work. In Art Studio and Planet Fitness, scholars got to create, condition, and connect through painting, drawing, dancing, and calisthenics. Finally, the cultural aspect of programming was still able to be present during thoughtfully curated virtual field trips to museums and “around the world” through the creation of virtual passports.

We had no idea just how brave we would have to be when we planned for Brave New Voices this summer. We mourned at least briefly for the gardening, outdoor learning, playing and traveling aspects of programming that weren’t able to happen this summer. Yet, our girls truly rose to the occasion, from coming to pick up bulging bags of supplies to logging on faithfully each day, sometimes with their parents taking part in a one-off lesson or two in between working from home. Brave New Voices was a prophecy and it came true! The lessons that we’ve learned from the flexibility and innovation that this required will serve our students, our schools, and the wider communities in which we reside for many summers to come.

-- Ms. Stephanie Okonkwo, LMCJ Site Director
-- Ms. Elisha James, RPCS Site Director

Students created individual yearbook pages about their 2020 summer experience as well as their experience during COVID-19 and how it has affected their lives. They set goals and provided a snapshot of the things they currently enjoy as a virtual time capsule. These selected yearbook pages show highlights from summer classes, something campers created during camp and goals for the upcoming school year.
Each week of Hamilton and Calvert’s summer partnership included a recap of the camp constitution written by the students. To devise the camp constitution, teachers led a discussion on the educational and behavioral commitments students wanted from themselves and each other. Student engagement – joy and enthusiasm for school – drops by half in middle school and to a third by high school. By writing a camp constitution, these Middle Grades Partnership students take ownership and set the direction of their education over the summer, increasing their engagement with the programming.

Having each guideline of the constitution begin with “we will” kept a positive focus on behavior, rather than a negative “do not” says Calvert School site director Neal McMahon. “Part of working together is cooperating and communicating. Developing the camp constitution together helps students from both schools recognize the importance of problem-solving to work through these guidelines.”

Responsibility for writing their camp constitution also ties into the Hamilton and Calvert STEM programming. “Students learn to problem-solve in STEM by taking what you have, then modifying it with building and testing,” said McMahon. “Creating the camp constitution has similar problem-solving skills with writing, creating, and testing.” This team-building activity also gave students responsibility for the virtual learning climate and set the tone for the program.

With a say in the policies and group discussion of what’s important, students are given a voice. This type of agency increases engagement as these middle schoolers take more ownership of their education. It’s especially important for students from historically marginalized communities as education is no longer just dictated to them. They become a part of their destiny.
We will respectfully work with our fellow camp members.
We will listen to all camp members’ ideas.
We will communicate and cooperate with each other.
We will be thoughtful and respectful of others while they are speaking.
We will speak and act friendly to others by including them.
We will say hello to at least one new person every day.
We will be agreeable and willing to compromise.
We will look for opportunities to improve our engineering and problem-solving skills.
We will participate, stay positive, and try our best during daily activities.
Cracking codes and learning to write them is one way the Mt. Royal and McDonogh partnership kept students engaged during a virtual summer and taught students problem-solving techniques. Cryptology is a science that studies codes, from the art of writing them to the skill of solving them. Over the Middle Grades Partnership summer, students learned different methodologies for making their own ciphers and breaking the secret languages that their classmates came up with.

“If we can help them develop problem-solving skills, think through problems, and think critically, they’ll become successful because they are problem-solvers,” said Mt. Royal site director Kera Murray.

Cryptography piqued student’s interest because code-breaking is mystery-solving. From the first coded message presented, students wanted to know what the message was and immediately wanted to try to write codes for friends and family to decipher.

If students couldn’t figure out the code the first time, they would try again. “The students would start to look at other possible answers and work through them to figure out the original message. They didn’t get frustrated. When they solved the puzzle, they’d try to think of ways and reasons to do it faster,” said Ms. Murray.

This kind of code-breaking also exposed students to potential careers in cybersecurity, data protection, and information technology. Writing in code also allowed students an outlet to send messages about summer 2020 including how Covid-19 was impacting them and about the wave of social justice change sweeping the country.
TRY IT FOR YOURSELF!

Example:

zvqqyr tenqrf cnegarefuvc
Middle Grades Partnership

Decipher this:

v hfrq gb guvax gung cbrgel jbhyq or zber yvxr fpubby guna pnzc, ohg abj v xabj gung vg vf npghnyyl ernyyl sha naq vagrerfgvat - nyrkuf

ROT13 (“rotate by 13 places”, sometimes hyphenated ROT-13) replaces a letter with the 13th letter after it in the alphabet. ROT13 is a special case of the Caesar cipher which was developed in ancient Rome.

Answer:

really fun and interesting - Alexis

I used to think that poetry would be more like school than camp, but now I know that it is actually
MGP LEADS is a new, groundbreaking year-round component of our programming. Building on our students’ innate interest in social justice, MGP LEADS facilitates each partnership tackling those issues in a deep, comprehensive, and age-appropriate way. Topics are selected by students and are realized through project-based learning. Students thus develop their voice, leadership capacity, and social-emotional maturity. MGP LEADS reinforces academic competencies, including organization, research, writing, and presentation, as well as important 21st century skills such as cultural competency, resilience, and teamwork.
THANK YOU

On behalf of our students, teachers, and board, we thank all those who contributed in 2020 for making a difference in the lives of Baltimore middle school youth.

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SEE IT FOR YOURSELF!

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Harnessing the power of education and community to transform students’ lives.

VISION
Uniting public and private school communities to create indelible experiences that enable students to thrive as friends, scholars, leaders, and citizens.