

# REIMAGINING MIDDLE GRADES

## Staff and Student Spotlight June 2021 - Volume 3, Edition 2

Broward County Public Schools (BCPS) is committed to changing the middle school experience for its students and implementing incremental steps that will ultimately lead to a systemic change in our District. The 2020-2021 school year marks the third year of the Reimagining Middle Grades initiative. It has been a unique year as we all have navigated education in the middle of a pandemic and having to reimagine schooling, as we know it.

Many of our classrooms have incorporated project-based learning (PBL) opportunities. Through this teaching approach, students are engaged in real-world and meaningful projects over an extended period. Students develop deep content knowledge as well as building upon their 21st century skills. Some teachers engaged their students in interactive online PBL learning experiences as an effective way to engage students and expose students to challenging and meaningful work.

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Social and emotional learning (SEL) supports students in a warm environment where their unique educational needs are met. Our middle school environments are enhanced by a school and classroom culture on safety, connection, and problem-solving. The pandemic lifted SEL to the forefront, as it was even more important to foster connection and safety before jumping into academics. Teachers found creative ways to check-in with their students to see who may need additional assistance. The plan also calls for increased electives and extracurricular activities at the middle school level. The goal is for our students to be engaged and

to have the social achievement to help them successfully transition from middle to high school and beyond.

### WHAT'S INSIDE

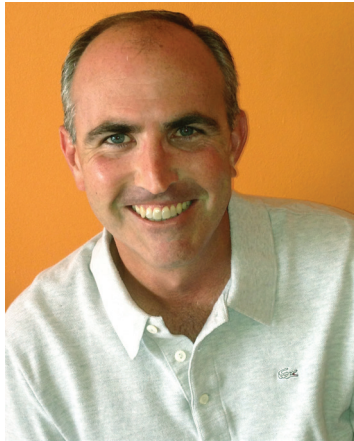
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## ENTHUSIASTIC LEADER MOTIVATES & CONNECTS TEACHERS IN THE PBL PROCESS

By Ashleigh Foutch, Staff Developer, Secondary Learning

Armed with experience and a framework, having been a teacher that implemented the former GLIDES technology initiative years ago, Mr. Timothy Gore recently began championing the PBL process at Silver Lakes Middle. GLIDES was a district initiative that launched in 2006



Mr. Timothy Gore

that would include the PBL structure in schools across the district while teaching students more about technology use. As a new teacher at the time, Mr. Gore saw the benefits and how the structure greatly helped him, and his students move through the PBL process. While attending the introductory project-based learning course as a part of Reimagining Middle Grades, he realized the similarities between the two and was excited the process had come full circle.

As the Magnet Coordinator at Silver Lakes Middle, he went to his leadership team and asked if it was possible to create some kind of PBL collaboration at the school. Although he agrees there is a lot of trial and error in the process, he stated, "Value has definitely been added to the teaching practices at Silver Lakes for any teacher that took the professional development offered by PBL Works (BUCK Institute)."

In his role at the school, Mr. Gore does consultations and models for the teachers what the PBL process should look like. "I like to help people move from conception to

implementation," he stated. One such teacher was Ms. Sandra Burgess. She was enthusiastic about implementing PBL but saw some challenges with reaching her ELL students. "I helped lead her to that solution by coordinating with the ELL teacher. She was one of the best when it came to collaborations. She had no fear; she was up for the challenge. When the students see that kind of collaboration, it sends a message. They know the work is meaningful. It was practical, immediate and, real-world."

Mr. Gore also guided Ms. Estelhomme who stated, "The project I did with my Algebra students during this process was creating a sidewalk design that will be beneficial to all people. Students learned about architecture, creating drafts of their work, and the mathematics behind it. They work in teams of six to design a sidewalk that would cater to different people. They learned about construction and their laws. It tied into their previous knowledge with slope, ratios, and conversions of units. Students drafted plans, made corrections, and presented their drafts to each other and to me for review. Students then created a completed draft of their designs. They also submitted a typed-up response describing their sidewalk design to include math calculations. This was my first attempt, and the students were not into it at first. However, when asked later at the end of the year, this was their favorite part of class."

Mr. Gore looks forward to further implementation in the upcoming school year. "I do see the potential and possibility of us building something that can be a model for others. Being accountable and supportive of each other will help us to achieve this," he stated.

Congratulations, Mr. Gore, on guiding the implementation of the PBL process and bridging the gaps for students and teachers in a distance-learning environment at Silver Lakes Middle School!



## POMPANO BEACH MIDDLE DISPLAYS EFFORT & RESILIENCE IN RISING TO THE PBL CHALLENGE

By Ashleigh Foutch, Staff Developer, Secondary Learning



Ms. Lisa Livingston

Implementing PBL at Pompano Beach Middle School is a school-wide effort with enthusiastic leadership at the helm. Ms. Lisa Livingston, the Assistant Principal, leads the charge. “I serve in the capacity of a coach and ensure the fidelity in what we want to accomplish. I provide that leadership piece to our Literacy Coach, as well as give support and guidance as to what we want to accomplish and how to stay the course of that vision,” she stated. “Our first year, we were grappling with the structure and how it worked. We realized we made many mistakes. However, we saw huge growth between our first and second year of implementation. Providing training, time, and getting buy-in from the teachers was important. We wanted to work with them and show them we are one.”



Ms. Angela Williams

To accomplish this, the Literacy Coach, Ms. Angela Williams designed a framework for the PBL cohorts to meet with their PLCs along with the content area teachers. The live document was designed within an online tool so it could be edited and viewed across the cohorts. This provided a platform for all to meet and plan. Since it was a new process for both teachers and students playing such a large role in the PBL, collaboration and thorough planning was imperative.

The process would not prove to be easy as Pompano Beach Middle is an iCAN (Integrated Career & Academic Networks) Magnet school with five different academies: Aviation Technology & Computer Engineering, eSports

& Athletic Sciences, Entertainment & Tourism, Information Technology, Communication, Broadcasting, and STEM Teacher Education. Within each of these academies, a PBL was designed. Students were to choose their essential question that was a challenging problem within the community. Given the pandemic, one inquiry was, How do we make teaching and learning more engaging?

“It was important to have the teaching and learning for students be intentional with having the students connect career and academics along with what’s happening within the community and be able to present to an audience,” Ms. Livingston stated. “We have that framework to engage critically within the five academies. As a magnet school, PBL must move from school to work to integrate and foster those relationships within the community.” One such instance was when the students from different academies presented to the School Advisory Council during one of their meetings. Students were able to pitch their idea to a live audience. “The presentations they have done this year really show the growth,” Ms. Williams informed.



Mr. Elliott Kopp

Mr. Eliot Kopp, a Speech & Debate and Law & Legal studies teacher at the school agreed, “Project-Based Learning has been a priority for Pompano Beach Middle School; all the administrators, captained by my principal, Ms. Sonja Brazier, promoted the importance and the positive impact to the students and the teachers of the PBL process. This process really went into high gear after Ms. Lisa Livingston arrived as the 7th Grade assistant principal. She has become the chief cheerleader for PBL. As a result, “all hands were on deck” this year as our academies prepared for their unique PBLs.”

He went on to enthusiastically describe the process and product that evolved in his classroom, In terms of the actual project,



## POMPANO BEACH MIDDLE DISPLAYS EFFORT & RESILIENCE IN RISING TO THE PBL CHALLENGE CONTINUED

each class was given a set of problems with which the city of Pompano Beach has had to deal, including poverty, housing, decreased tourism, racism, crime, et al. Responsibilities were divided by a student's comfort level.

Therefore, students who did not want to be video or audiotaped were assigned to research the above topics. Students who preferred to speak about the issues, but not be seen were assigned the audio news reports. Students who wanted to be seen and heard were videotaped, giving the news reports as "anchors" at a news station would do. As mentioned previously, student leaders worked with their classroom groups to create the newscasts. After all the newscasts were completed, one student was assigned to take them from the five different classes and edit them with editing software on his home computer, as part of the revision process. The final products flowed seamlessly and were placed online for all the students and faculty to view. Additionally, all administrators were given CDs of the newscasts for their own personal use and enjoyment. "The PBL process works! My students were engaged, they brought their many talents to bear upon a successful outcome, leaders were made, fun was had, knowledge was obtained, work ethic was increased and pride in performance was developed. What more could a teacher ask for?"

Angela Williams concurred, "I am very proud of our staff, our teachers, and our administration for allowing me to build in time for planning for them. Everybody was so supportive. We have shown tremendous growth this year in the middle of a pandemic, so I cannot imagine what it will look like once we regain some normalcy."

Congratulations to Pompano Beach Middle School for a school-wide effort in implementing PBL during such a challenging time for our teachers and students!

## NAVIGATING MIDDLE SCHOOL DURING A PANDEMIC

*By Tanya Thompson, Project Coordinator - Reimagining Middle Grades*

March 12, 2020....that was the last day BCPS schools were open, and we were under the impression that the school closures would be for a few weeks. Our reality was quickly disrupted as we had to explore new ways to educate our students and communicate with each other. There were many examples of people going above and beyond to make sure our families were taken care of and that our employees and students were safe. We have lived our own reality and have heard countless stories exchanged. In an effort to bring this experience full circle, we take a moment to touch base with some of our middle school students to share what this unique time has been like for them.

### **What was e-learning like for you?**



*Si'mor*

**Si'mor:** It was hard sometimes understanding the assignments. Once I was able to understand the assignments, then I was able to complete what I was being asked to do. I also thought I would miss my friends more but then I got used to not being around them. It was also a challenge to manage my time effectively.

**Elizabeth:** It was rough and one that I would not willingly do again. I was not engaged, and I was not used to it. It was different. I did not feel like I was connected to the classroom because I did not see anyone there since the





## NAVIGATING MIDDLE SCHOOL DURING A PANDEMIC CONTINUED

cameras were off. It almost did not feel real. My grades were not the same either. Usually, I get grades like A's and B's but that was not the case with e-learning.



Sa'raye

**Sa'raye:** I did not like it because I was lacking in my grades. I could not manage it. I missed my friends and having connections with people.

learn from home because I am not able to get the help I needed.

### ***What feelings did you have once you came back to school?***

**Si'mor:** I came back to school in January. I almost was getting used to learning from home. When I came back, it felt like another first day of school. I was happy to see my friends. I also found it helpful when I was in class and could get the help I needed from my teacher because he or she was right there with me. I know that helped me a lot because last quarter I got straight A's on my report card.



Elizabeth

**Elizabeth:** I came back in February and when I came back, I was full of good feelings. It was nice seeing my teachers in person. I was nervous though because they probably had a different view of me because of my online performance.

**Sa'Raye:** I was having mixed emotions. It was a little hard to make friends and my connection with my teachers was not what I wanted it to be.



Liyah

**Liyah:** I was excited to come back. I had to persuade my parents to let me come back to school. It is just so much easier when you are back in school. I was also looking forward to seeing my friends because I did not see them for a very long time. Most of my friends were from Challenger Elementary but

I also made some new friends. We needed to catch up when we first saw each other again but the true connection came when I was able to see them face to face.

### ***Do you feel like you are part of a school family? Why or why not?***

**Si'mor:** Yes, I feel welcomed by teachers and students everywhere I go.

**Elizabeth:** Yes, the teachers here are very helpful and I am close to my classmates. I have gotten to know my classmates better because the setting is small.

**Liya:** The teachers and staff are supportive and make us feel welcomed.

### ***How has social-emotional learning (SEL) helped you during this time?***

**Si'mor:** My teacher does Second Step SEL lessons with me. They are helpful but I don't have an opportunity to be in those situations that we learn about. Even though I have not had to use the skills from the lesson, I feel I have skills to help me in the situations if they were to come up.

**Sa'Raye:** I participated in some afterschool mindfulness sessions with two of my teachers.



## NAVIGATING MIDDLE SCHOOL DURING A PANDEMIC CONTINUED

These sessions were like a release for me. At first, I did not want to participate in them but once I understood the purpose of the lessons, I opened up a bit more and even led some of the sessions.



Liyah with Mrs. Richter

**Liya:** My homeroom teacher does Second Step lessons with the class to teach us different SEL skills. I like the lessons and I learn how to handle my emotions in a healthy way. I also learn how to get along

with people and communicate better when I am talking to others.

### **What message would you like to give your teachers after this year?**

**Si'mor:** Thank you.

**Elizabeth:** Thank you for understanding and giving me time to grasp what is going since this year has been crazy. I appreciate your flexibility and adapting your work because of the unique times.



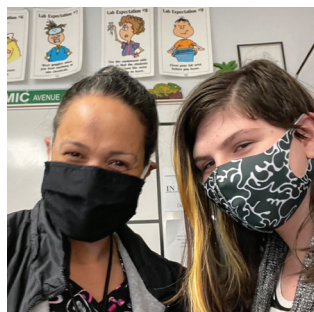
Sa'Raye with Ms. Ortiz

**Sa'Raye:** Thank you for teaching me and making me feel welcomed and wanted in your classroom.

**Liyah:** Thank you. You were always here for us. I want you to know that I realize it was

a little frustrating for you too because some students were just able to hide behind their cameras and not work as hard. I appreciate you.

### **Any other final thoughts to share?**



Elizabeth with Ms. Rivera

**Elizabeth:** I am really glad that this year happened. It unlocked in me an understanding of what I do best and what I needed to do to be a better student. I work better when I can see others and I also learned the

importance of the working environment. It was not an ideal situation, but it will help me when I go back to face-to-face learning and I am hoping that will be soon.

The 2020-2021 school year will be an interesting time to reflect upon. While there may have been difficult times, collectively we have been able to overcome challenges and reimagine the typical way of doing things. The structures we have established in our schools coupled with caring adults have played a role in providing the predictability and routine that pre-adolescents developmentally thrive on. Time will tell, but an unintended result of this time may be that our students have thrived. The hope is that our students have emerged from this pandemic being resilient and have blossomed in the areas of self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, relationship skills, and social awareness. If in fact, that growth occurs in our students, it will be powerful and its impact will go beyond the classroom, our schools, and our communities in more ways than one will ever be able to ascertain.

Thank you to the following students for offering their unique perspective: Si'mor is an eighth-grader from Attucks Middle, Elizabeth is a seventh-grader from Millennium 6-12 Collegiate Academy, Liya is a sixth-grader also from Millennium 6-12 Collegiate Academy, and Sa'Raye is a sixth-grader from New Renaissance Middle.



## PARTNERS IN EDUCATION

Broward County Public Schools (BCPS) is proud to continue its partnership with the Community Foundation of Broward. Part of our Reimagining Middle Grades work is driven by the largest grant ever awarded by the Community Foundation of Broward, \$3 million – \$1 million over the past three years. The District has also matched the grant from the Community Foundation. This makes the total contribution to the Reimagining Middle Grades initiative to be \$6 million.

The ten schools associated with the grant are: Apollo, Attucks, Bair, Crystal Lake, Lauderdale Lakes, New Renaissance, New River, Nova, Silver Lakes, and Sunrise. At each of the schools, the grant has funded an additional person to help to improve attendance, reduce risk-taking behaviors and increase academic achievement on a subset of students. Additionally, each of the ten schools have created personalization classes to ensure all students obtain academic success and have the necessary social-emotional learning supports. The three-year grant has been extended to end in June 2022 as a result of the school closures caused by the pandemic.

## RECOGNITION CORNER

Support for ‘School is Cool’ has been provided by the following Funds at the Community Foundation:

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