

REIMAGINING MIDDLE GRADES

Staff and Student Spotlight February 2021 Volume 3, Edition 1

Broward County Public Schools 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.

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.

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 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.

RAISING MORALE & MOTIVATION THROUGH PROJECT BASED LEARNING

By Ashleigh Foutch, Secondary Learning, Instructional Facilitator



As a first year broadcasting teacher, Michelle Arnoux had the challenge of designing an engaging learning environment during a pandemic. Mood, morale, and motivation definitely needed to be raised, and so Ms. Arnoux adopted the idea of having students work together cooperatively to construct monthly motivational videos. Students would be able to motivate their own peers with their product, while working through the creative stages. The driving question was:

'How can we motivate middle school students to learn when morale is low due to distance learning?'

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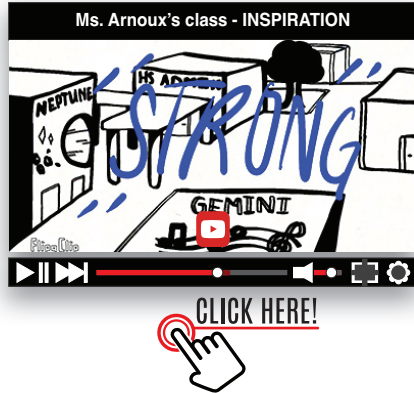
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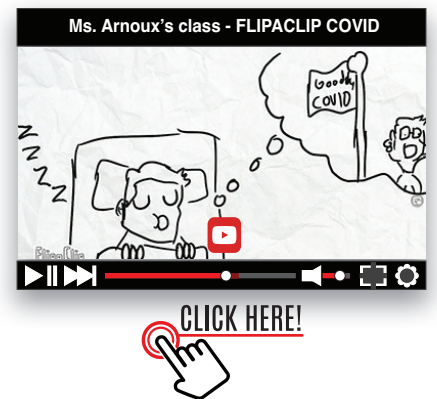
“The process began with me showing them different motivational videos,” Ms. Arnoux stated. “We discussed things like what makes something newsworthy and interesting? Who is the target audience? How is it relevant? Answering these questions assisted the students in acquiring ideas for their own videos,” she explained.

Various sets of classes had different themes. For example, the first quarter themes were Gratitude and Inspiration. Thus, designs based on these themes were to be developed. The overall idea was to instill these concepts into the mindsets of middle school students by using an authentic product created by their own peers.

In small groups, students brainstormed ideas. With group roles defined, students were to create a storyboard for their video before developing a pitch deck of slides that students would use to “pitch” their idea to the editor (Ms. Arnoux) and their peers. During this process, the editor and peers would provide feedback so the students could edit and revise their videos.

As the students generated their videos in their TEAMS breakout rooms, Ms. Arnoux would frequently visit to provide additional feedback for editing and revision. This stage also allowed for reflection on the process and challenging problem. After the last feedback session, the final public product was established and ready for school-wide broadcast.

As the third quarter approaches, Ms. Arnoux has reflected and already adjusted the course of action for this PBL. She now has cultivated creative teams. “I realized that some students were artists, while others were better with technology or liked to be in front of the camera. Therefore, I now allow them to pick their own teams and roles. This permits them to have some ownership over their product, develop their creative team and present in different ways, enabling voice and choice. This method also incorporates SEL, as it engages them in a cooperative learning process and teaches them how to resolve conflict, so everyone is heard,” she clarified. “I also have them explain their vision for the video in the beginning before waiting to see their pitch, so I can closely monitor how it advances.”



Ms. Arnoux has enjoyed the activity just as much as her students who have stated they are thankful for making class fun and engaging. “Some enjoy the break from the textbook, while others were apprehensive to begin an extensive process. Once they were able to unleash their creativity, they became more comfortable,” she expressed.



RAISING MORALE & MOTIVATION THROUGH PROJECT BASED LEARNING CONTINUED



Adhering to the theme of gratitude, Ms. Arnoux demonstrates gratitude herself. She revealed, “I am grateful for other teachers and the administration I have that are supportive. When you have an idea and want to see it through, it is nice to have that support. We are only as strong as the people are on our team. They have been there every step of the way to help out.”

Congratulations, Ms. Arnoux, for taking on the challenge of creating engaging and authentic student projects in a distance-learning environment. Your students will not soon forget these enriching lessons!

CREATING ENGAGING & RELEVANT PBL IN A DISTANCE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

By Ashleigh Foutch, Secondary Learning, Instructional Facilitator



Engaging students in a distance-learning environment during the 2020 school year was a challenge for Alicia Dukes of McNicol Middle, as it was for all teachers. Having conducted successful Project Based Learning (PBL) ventures previously in her face-to-face classroom, she decided to embed PBL into her e-learning curriculum. Ms. Dukes, an ELA teacher, wanted to use her background as an art teacher to incorporate creativity and student engagement. Therefore, she generated the idea of having students create a children’s book where the requirement for the main character was specific to an emotion versus a person. This project combined Social Emotional Learning with other disciplines, which resulted in rich class discussion, as it was extremely powerful and relevant to the current social climate.

The project included creating a Nearpod (an interactive lesson platform) within her Canvas course to guide the students through the process from beginning to end. The driving question was: How can we create an electronic book (e-Book) for children who need SEL (Social Emotional Learning)? The Nearpod proceeded to identify project guidelines, engage students in pertinent activities and videos, and provide rubrics for feedback that the students would be using.

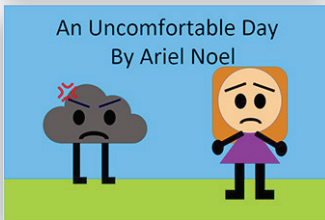




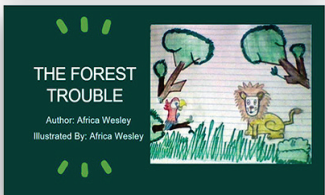
CREATING ENGAGING & RELEVANT PBL IN A DISTANCE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT CONTINUED



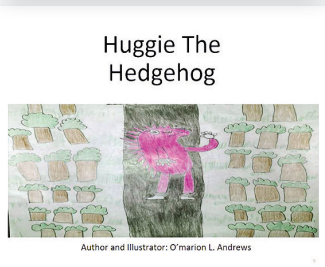
The goal was to have her students share their completed e-books with a pre-k or kindergarten class, but the distance-learning environment made that difficult. The students ended up sharing their completed e-books via Microsoft TEAMS with other teachers and principals. Eventually, her goal is to create an anthology combined with previous student creations from the same PBL.



Ms. Dukes was fascinated with the student work and its impact on the students. “They loved to show their product and were at times genuinely impressed with each other’s work,” she stated. “They really enjoyed illustrating. However, the challenge for them was writing and grammar. Using the rubric provided on the PBL Works website allowed for me to provide specific feedback, as well as for them to give feedback to each other,” she explained.



“At first the process was slow, but when they saw it come together they felt a sense of empowerment as authors. It was a proud moment. I was surprised at their finished product. Some of them blew me away. In most cases, they gave me more than I had hoped for,” she affirmed. Her second assigned PBL requires students to create a board game aligned to a core content subject. Students will focus on 2-4 standards for their choice of the content area that will engage children in their age group.



“Every time I do a PBL it makes me want to create another one. Many people do not expect these kids to shine and these kids really produce, so it energizes the kids and me. I am able to get a lot out of them that most would not expect. It creates a real sense of pride for the students and for me.”

Congratulations, Ms. Dukes on using PBL to make such an impact on your students and their learning during such a challenging time.



NEW RENAISSANCE MIDDLE

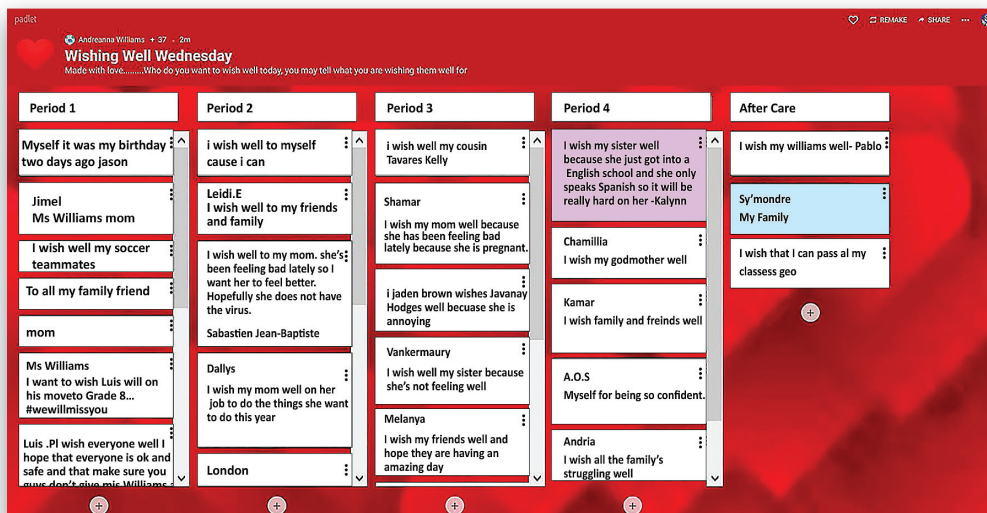
By Sierra Goggins, SEL Specialist



Originally and proudly from Jamaica, Ms. Andreanna Williams joined Broward County Public Schools five years ago. Her teaching style and compassion for her students translated smoothly as she embarked on her new journey in South Florida. In adjusting to South Florida, some consistencies remained. In Jamaica, her days consisted of starting every class with daily devotionals. Although different in the content of the daily discussion, but similar in building daily connections with her students, Ms. Williams developed a different way to check-in with her students prior to any academic instruction.

Ms. Williams' teaching background expands from elementary school to middle school. It is in middle school where she implemented Conscious Discipline and as a result continues to build strong connections with her students. She was trained in Conscious Discipline during the summer of 2018 and she found the session to be informative. Conscious Discipline is a trauma-informed, research-based approach that provides an array of behavior management strategies and classroom structures that teachers can use to turn everyday situations into learning opportunities. As she pivoted to e-learning, she has managed to uphold the Conscious Discipline approach with high fidelity to ensure she continues to build connections with her students to create a safe space for learning.

Ms. Williams states, "The virtual space did add a level of adjustment, and some things did have to change." Some adjustments included one of her favorite activities, Wishing Wells. She created



Example of Ms. Williams' Wishing Well Wednesday Padlet activity

a *virtual* Wishing Wells, through the interactive website, Padlet. Instead of students heading to a physical bulletin board in the classroom to post well wishes to students who were absent or in need of support. Ms. Williams uses a Padlet activity to have students post their Wishing Well on a virtual board, allowing their classmates to view post, either anonymously or identifiably. This provides an opportunity to be

heard, feel a sense of belonging, and know that their teacher and peers care for them.



NEW RENAISSANCE MIDDLE CONTINUED

Creating a warm and safe space allows for Ms. Williams' students to know, whether they are virtual or not, that she deeply cares about their entire well-being. Her students learn strategies to cope during difficult times, like taking a moment to breathe. Establishing that the breathing technique she learned through Conscious Discipline serves as an essential self-regulation strategy, so students can make positive choices during challenging times.

Ms. Williams even notes on one occasion she was visibly frustrated so she had a student coach her through this moment by saying, "Ms. you need to breathe. I'll breathe for you." The fact that students are engaged in learning these strategies, implementing them and then encouraging others to use these skills proves a true testament of Ms. Williams' dedication toward supporting her students through SEL. This also demonstrates that Ms. Williams believes in the power of Conscious Discipline as she uses these strategies to become the best educator she can be for her students, and the best person for herself.

Ms. Williams' understanding of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory aligns directly with Conscious Discipline's Brain State Model. She highlights the value of the scientific approach within Conscious Discipline, "if they [students] are not tapping into their executive state, much learning would not be going on. Learning breathing techniques, to stop, take a deep breath and relax could help them tap into their executive state, which was intriguing, and I had to continue this approach [with my students]."

**"Conscious
Discipline
helps her, and
her colleagues
remember to
stop, breathe,
and not react"**

Some of the other helpful Conscious Discipline examples, which resonated within Ms. Williams' classroom climate included Wishing Well Wednesdays, Breathing Techniques, Brain Smart Starts, Rituals, and Celebration of Success. Ms. Williams believes "SEL is just as important as academics. It helps to support the academics. Therefore, it shouldn't be seen as extra work but just infused in your lessons. It is not taking away from the content. For example, whenever students are transitioning during their lessons, the breathing techniques is a useful tool to help the students refocus. Keep practicing and some students will buy into it." It is apparent Ms. Williams is a leader in SEL at her school, and her teachings will have a lasting impact on students, her colleagues and school community.

Ms. Williams possesses a true belief in the importance of SEL for her students. Once she was exposed to the professional learning, she implemented those Conscious Discipline structures in her classroom. She also was compelled to share this knowledge with her colleagues at the department level, with families at SAC and SAF meetings, and she has opened her classroom doors for all to view her Wishing Well bulletin board and has even assisted some of her colleagues with setting up their own. Her conviction that the SEL curriculum is just as important as the academic curriculum has led her to join the Conscious Discipline Ambassadors group. In this new role, she will be able to share the foundations of Conscious Discipline with other schools in the District via a two-day training called, "Ignite and Excite." This will be the initial professional development to help create the mindset shift in adults as they interact with students. She is part of a group of fifteen other individuals who will be ready to teach others about Conscious Discipline, beginning in the summer of 2021. Ms. Williams' light shines brightly and will make a difference across our District as we weave the work of Conscious Discipline into the fabric of our middle schools.



THE CULTURE OF PERSONALIZATION COMES TO MIDDLE SCHOOL

To augment the reach to the target population students, Broward County Public Schools has incorporated the Personalization for Academic and Social Emotional Learning (PASL) classes at the middle school level. This enhancement mimics the framework developed across our high schools. Vanderbilt University has been integral in the research done at the high school level and has partnered with us at the middle school level as well.

With PASL, administrators, counselors, and teachers by engaging in organizational routines and norms of practice that institutionalize personalization. By deliberately fostering caring and supportive adult-student relationships, adults help students increase their sense of belonging at their school that, in turn, leads to higher levels of self-efficacy and student success.

During the 2019-2020 school year, we had ten schools implementing PASL and now seven more schools have come on board for the 2020-2021 school year. Here is a sampling of the success stories being evidenced across the schools as a result of PASL.

LAMAR - NEW RENAISSANCE MIDDLE



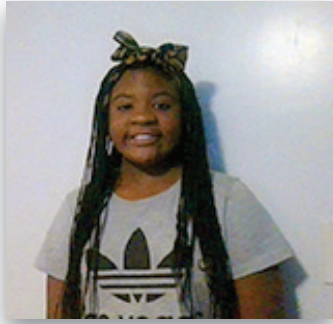
Lamar was experiencing academic challenges at the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year as evidenced by his first quarter report card where he earned straight F's. He was not putting in any effort to complete assignments. The report card was a wake-up call for him. He is now motivated and trying to bring up his grades. He even takes his iPad to the cafeteria to complete assignments during lunch. For the second quarter, he brought up his grades in six of his eight classes and is continuing to make efforts to increase his grades in the last two classes. He has been with his PASL teacher for a year and a half. Recently, he wrote a letter to his PASL teacher, Mrs. Gibbons, where he expressed gratitude for her and expressed that everyone in the class should feel lucky to have her as

their teacher because she cares so much about her students and helps them to do a better job in school and in life.

--Nominated by Althea Gibbons, PASL Teacher at New Renaissance Middle



DARLIS - SUNRISE MIDDLE



Darlis is a bright young girl who was not attending classes regularly in the first quarter of the 2020-2021 school year, but has shown dramatic improvement on attendance for the second quarter. Darlis is now tracking her assignments and keeping up with her work. She actively participates in class discussions, smiling, and happy to see her PASL teacher, Mrs. Dwelly! Darlis is socially aware and asserted herself when two classmates were bickering in the chat, while the teacher was helping two students. Darlis took it upon herself to type in the chat, "You guys should stop! Ms. Dwelly said we are family and family shouldn't talk to each other like that!" The feeling of community and family were explained to the students as the teacher communicated hopes and goals for the

PASL class. Darlis is working towards a goal of A & B honor roll for the second quarter. Darlis is currently struggling in Fitness but she expects her grade to improve because she has done all of her assignments. Darlis looks forward to participating in face-to-face instruction for the third quarter.

--Nominated by Ms. Dwelly, PASL Teacher at Sunrise Middle

JAZMAINE - NEW RIVER MIDDLE

Jazmaine has been dealing with some personal challenges at home. She has a great smile despite what she is going through. Jazmaine is learning from home and is inconsistent with logging in to the virtual daily class sessions. Her PASL teacher, Mrs. Rodriguez, is constantly in contact with Jazmaine through Inbox on Canvas letting her know that she is here to help her. Mrs. Rodriguez also encourages her to attend as many Teams meetings as possible. Jazmaine is really trying her best and thrives off encouragement. Her grades are not perfect, but is working towards passing all of her classes for the 2nd marking period. Jazmaine stands out as a strong, determined, and smart young lady.

--Nominated by Mrs. Rodriguez, PASL teacher at New River Middle



BRANDON, NOVA MIDDLE



Pre-pandemic, Brandon could be classified as your average ‘at-risk’ youth. He was constantly skipping class, being placed in in-school suspension, or worse, suspended. Before the pandemic, the process was started to have his reassignment rescinded. Once the school year resumed, administration sat down with both he and his mother and agreed to give Brandon another chance to make good and positive decisions. His first quarter grades were not stellar, but he showed significant academic and behavioral improvement in the second quarter. Another layer to Brandon’s story is that Nova Middle School was one of the five schools to be awarded the Verizon Innovative Schools Grant – giving all of faculty, staff and students an iPad to take home. When openings were advertised for students to be a part of the Tech Team, Brandon applied. He interviewed and was accepted as a member of the Tech Team. Brandon has told us that being a part of the Tech Team brings him a sense of pride and fulfillment. His teachers and peers no longer see him as the class clown or class disruption, but as “the 8th Grade Tech Guy who knows all about the iPads.” In addition, he has shown some personal growth by opening doors for ladies and encouraging his peers to do better. The success in this story, is that even at his lowest point, when he was so close to giving up, he pushed on.

-Nominated by Melissa Johnkins, Assistant Principal at Nova Middle

NICOLE, CRYSTAL LAKE MIDDLE



Last year, Nicole arrived in her PASL Class as a shy, 6th grader who was reluctant to participate in class discussions. Nicole would often skip classes and made every attempt to hang out with 8th grade students from her home country of Brazil. She did not believe she could fit in with her other peers due to her language barrier. Fast forward to this year, Nicole is a “ROCK STAR” in PASL Class! She went from a student who avoided class to an honor roll candidate; she has five A’s and one B. Nicole attends class every day and actively participates in class discussions. Not only does she engage in the Second Step SEL lessons, but has also been seen putting the strategies into practice. Nicole reports that mindfulness and the calming down strategies have made her a more mature and well person.

--Nominated by Mrs. Franklin, Crystal Lake 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 each of the next 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 has created personalization classes to ensure all students obtain academic success and have the necessary social-emotional learning supports.

RECOGNITION CORNER

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

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- Broward’s Tribute to Children Fund
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- The Huizenga Fund for Children
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