

Evaluation of Middle Grades Partnership

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Executive Summary

Overview

The Middle Grades Partnership (MGP) is a program that offers academically promising middle school youth in Baltimore the opportunity to gain entrance into and excel in the city's most challenging high schools. Funded by local private foundations and individuals, MGP identifies potential scholars during their sixth-grade year and provides them with intensive summer programs bolstered by additional sessions during the school year. The focus of the extended educational program is to improve students' algebra, reading, and writing skills, with the ultimate goal of having its graduates leave the program equipped to excel in an advanced high school program.

MGP consists of eleven different partnerships between public and independent schools. Each partnership is led by two teachers, one from each school, and these teachers design and implement the curriculum. By design, there is substantial variability in the content and activities across

sites. A pilot during the summer of 2005 enrolled 150 students. The program went to scale in the summer of 2006, and approximately 450 students enrolled.

In 2007, the Center for Adolescent Health at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health began its evaluation study of the Middle Grades Partnership (MGP) to answer four main questions:

1. What are the key components of an effective partnership?
2. What are the perceived strengths and weaknesses of MGP?
3. What is the perceived impact of MGP?
4. Do participants of MGP improve their algebra skills over the course of the summer?



The original design of the MGP evaluation consisted of two phases: 1) a process evaluation, which highlighted the strengths and weakness of MGP across the different sites, and 2) outcome monitoring, which tracked the academic and learning outcomes of adolescents prior to, during, and after their participation in the MGP summer programs.

Findings

The evaluation used a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods. For the process evaluation, focus group discussions and in-depth interviews were used among MGP students, parents, MGP staff, and board members to obtain detailed and rich descriptions of the participants' opinions and perceptions. In addition, to understand the learning and family environment of the MPG students, student surveys were conducted in the summer of 2007. Finally, to monitor the outcomes among MGP students, pre- and posttests of algebra were administered, and attendance data were collected among MGP students enrolled in the summer program. Additional academic data were obtained from the Baltimore City Public School System.

Findings: What is the learning and family environment of MGP students?

Students surveys conducted in the summer of 2007 demonstrated the following:

- A large proportion of MGP students (72%) live in single-parent households or without their biological parents present in the household.
- MGP students have a high level of self-efficacy for being able to do well in school.
- MGP students perceive that their parents/caregivers place value on their education.
- MGP students who believed their parents/caregivers knew the value of their education were more likely to believe that they, themselves, can do well in school.
- More than half of MGP students (57%) reported being a victim of verbal or sexual harassment during the past year.
- Nearly half of MGP students (44%) have a friend who is a gang member.
- More than two-thirds of MGP students watch more than 3 hours of TV per day; 41% play more than 3 hours of video games per day.
- MGP students who had friends in gangs were less likely to have positive attitudes about academics; MGP

students who watched more TV and played more video games were also less likely to have positive attitudes about academics.

- Interestingly, despite the large numbers of MGP students who face numerous risks in their lives, they still have a high level of self-confidence to perform well in school.

Findings from Outcome Monitoring

The primary outcomes monitored during the evaluation were MGP program attendance, pretest/posttests in algebra, MSA scores, and school attendance. Our analyses of these outcomes revealed the following:

- Students' performance on the algebra pretest was not at all related to their prior engagement in learning or their parents' involvement in their learning.
- Students' academic engagement, including parental attitude, did not influence attendance in the program.
- Attendance in MGP varied significantly by site and could not be explained by different selection criteria across the sites. **This means that what the sites did during their programs influenced attendance.**
- Over the course of the summer of 2009, MGP participants demonstrated substantial gains in pre-algebra skills. Because these gains occurred during the summer, when students were not in school, **these gains are almost certainly due to MGP.**
 - The gains occurred for both boys and girls and for students in all grades.
- MGP participants demonstrated substantial improvement in reading MSA scores. This pattern bucked the overall trend in the city.
- On other measures of academic success, MGP students showed no improvement.
 - The proportions scoring in the basic category on the math MSA increased, consistent with the trend for all Baltimore students.
 - The gains were highly uneven across partnerships. Students in a handful of sites made stunning gains.
 - MGP students' school attendance did not improve.

Findings from Process Evaluation: What are the key components of a successful partnership?

Interview data among the public and independent MGP



directors revealed that the following components need to be in place for the partnership to work effectively:

- There must be agreement on the MGP goals for students among both independent and public school directors and teachers.
- The heads of the schools, both independent and public, must exert buy in' and commitment to MGP.
- The roles of each director and teacher involved in MGP must be clearly established to successfully plan and execute the curriculum.
- Each director and teacher must be willing to discuss problems and issues as they arise.

What are the perceived strengths and weaknesses of MGP?

The primary strengths of MGP, as perceived by students, MGP staff, parents, and MGP board members are the following:

- MGP exposes inner city students to new environments and teaching styles.
- MGP increases students' motivation to learn and improve self confidence.
- MGP has a unique model of establishing true partnerships. One board member summarized this well: "Previous programs have usually had a model where the privileged are giving to the less privileged—and its one-sided. MGP, however, is about true partnerships."

The primary weaknesses and challenges of MGP which were revealed included:

- The after-school program. At the time of the evaluation, the after-school program was implemented in the public schools. However, both students and directors felt it was very difficult to be engaged in an after-school program that was held in the same school environment. Some directors also felt that there was no clear guidance on what the after-school program was expected to achieve.
- Parental involvement. From the perspective of both parents and MGP staff, parents were not being adequately reached for the MGP program. Transportation and scheduling were mentioned as primary constraints for being involved from the viewpoint of parents. Directors, meanwhile, felt that MGP should try to offer skills trainings to parents to get them to be better involved.
- Lack of administrative buy-in from some partnerships. For directors and MGP board members, a major

challenge of MGP is the lack of buy-in for the program on the part of school administrators. Some said principals of certain public schools are the main challenge to their entire program and without their commitment and understanding of MGP, they are not able to select experienced teachers for MGP.

What is the perceived impact of MGP?

Overwhelmingly, students who participated in the focus groups remarked on how MGP has improved not only their academic skills, but also helped them to achieve more self-confidence, a better sense in problem solving, and an increased ability to interact with people from different backgrounds. Parents echoed the responses of students and overwhelmingly felt that MGP was making a huge difference in their child's life. The impact of MGP was described in various ways, from helping their child improve his/her grades and increasing their desire for learning to increasing their child's level of maturity and ability to be responsible.

Conclusions

This evaluation revealed that although students in MGP face serious risks to their educational success—e.g., many living with neither parent and many having a high level of exposure to violence and sexual harassment—their motivation and desire to learn has not been compromised. In fact, through the academically intensive, but fun, summer program, students in MGP have actually been able to improve on their algebra skills. One of the main strengths of MGP is exposing students to a wide variety of environments and teaching styles. Through these different environments, MGP motivates students by providing them with a chance to see their lives through a different lens. Also, the increase in social connections and positive role models helps MGP students to thrive.

The weaknesses that were revealed in the process evaluation, for the most part, have already been addressed in the design of MGP. We know, for example, that a new full-time staff member has been hired; we also know that the central office of MGP has moved to a new location; and finally, we know that the after-school program will be re-developed in the future.

As MGP staff look towards the future, most believe that before the program can be expanded, it needs to stay focused on reaching perfection. The findings from this study can, therefore, provide important information for reaching that level of excellence.



We recommend two next steps.

First, an in-depth look at the high-performing sites could provide insights that could strengthen the entire MGP program.

1. How are students selected for the sites?
2. What are the qualifications and the skills of the teachers?
3. What curricula do they use?
4. What do they think are the strengths and weaknesses of their program?

5. What is the perceived and actual strength of the two-way partnership between institutions?

This inquiry could be readily conducted by MGP staff.

Second, we recommend the MGP program choose measures of accountability. If it is important to show improvement in the accountability measures used by the public schools—MSA scores, grades, and attendance—then the program should be adapted to specifically target improvements in those outcomes. If other measures are chosen, then the program components should be aligned accordingly.

MGP Evaluation Report Introduction

Youth in urban settings face serious risks to their educational success. In Baltimore, as in many urban settings, the middle school grades are a time when students, as a whole, lose academic ground. According to the most recently published data from the Baltimore City Public Schools (from 2008–2009), 58.9% of 5th grade students were proficient in mathematics, as measured by the Maryland School Assessment (MSA). However, by the time students reach the 8th grade, there is a substantial decline in their math proficiency. Less than a third of 8th graders (28.7%) achieved proficiency in math and just 10.5% of 8th grade students received scores that placed them in the advanced category for mathematics. Students who fail to achieve proficient performance in math by the 8th grade are much less likely to successfully complete high school and go to college. This precipitous decline in academic success is due to a multitude of complex factors, but in the research literature is primarily related to two main causes: 1) a dearth of educational experiences that keep students engaged and learning, and 2) a lack of constructive activities and adult supervision during the out-of-school hours, particularly over the summer. In fact, there is already well-documented evidence to show that inner city Baltimore students suffer much more from the summer learning gap, a loss in educational progress over the summer, than higher-income students in Baltimore City¹.

1 Alexander K, Entwisle D, and Olson LS. (2007). Lasting Consequences of the Summer Learning Gap. *American Sociological Review* 72: 167–180; Alexander K, Entwisle D, and Olson LS

In an effort to improve the academic achievement gap among middle school students numerous models of out-of-school programs have been developed. In Baltimore, the Middle Grades Partnership (MGP) is one such program that offers academically promising middle-school youth the opportunity to gain entrance into and excel in the city's most challenging high schools. Funded by local private foundations and individuals, MGP identifies potential scholars during their sixth-grade year and provides them with intensive summer programs bolstered by additional sessions during the school year. The focus of the extended educational programs is to improve students' algebra, reading, and writing skills, with the ultimate goal of having its graduates leave the program equipped to excel in an advanced high school program.

MGP consists of eleven partnerships between public and independent schools (see Table 1 for the list of these partnerships). Each partnership is led by two teachers, one from each school, and these teachers design and implement the curriculum. By design, there is substantial variability in the content and activities across sites. A pilot during the summer of 2005 enrolled 150 students. The program went to scale in the summer of 2006, and approximately 450 6th grade students enrolled.

(2001). Schools, achievement, and inequality: A seasonal perspective. *Educational evaluation and Policy Analysis* 23, 171–191.



Table 1: Listing of Partnerships included in Evaluation

Independent School/University	Public School
Boys' Latin School	Garrison Middle School (boys)
Calvert School	Francis Scott Key Elementary-Middle School
Friends School	Hampstead Hill Academy ConneXions Community Leadership Academy
Garrison Forest School	City Springs Elementary-Middle School (Girls) Collington Square Elementary-Middle School (Girls)
Gilman School	Collington Square Elementary-Middle School (boys) City Springs Elementary-Middle School (boys)
Gilman School	New Song Academy
McDonogh School	Mt. Royal Elementary-Middle School
Park School	Winston Middle School
Roland Park Country School	Garrison Middle School (girls)
Towson University	Calverton Middle School*
Bryn Mawr*	Canton Middle*
*Schools no longer part of MGP	

Since each of the partnerships greatly differs in terms of the activities they implement, the philosophical approach to teaching, and the structure of their partnership, it was important for the directors and funders of MGP to know what aspects of the program and of the specific partnerships were the most effective in improving academic achievement. The Center for Adolescent Health at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health was awarded a contract to conduct an evaluation to not only determine the key components of each partnership, but to also track any changes that occurred in academic achievement among MGP students.

The Evaluation

The design of the MGP evaluation consisted of two phases: 1) a process evaluation, which highlighted the strengths and weakness of MGP across the different sites, and 2) outcome monitoring, which tracked the academic and learning outcomes of adolescents prior to, during, and after their participation in the MGP summer and year-round programs.

The next section, Section 2, describes the overall study design and the range of methods that were used in the evaluation. Section 3 presents the results of the student survey, which provides a profile of the students who were enrolled in MGP during the summer of 2007; Section 4 presents the results of the outcome monitoring; Section 5 presents the findings from the process evaluation, and finally, Section 6, summarizes the key findings and the implications for the future of MGP. Results from the impact evaluation are presented in a separate document.

This evaluation study used a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods. Below is a detailed description of each of these methods, organized first by the evaluation phase and then by the primary research questions they addressed.



Data Collected for Evaluation

The Process Evaluation

The process evaluation designed for MGP was guided by three primary questions:

- What are the key components of an effective partnership?
- What are the perceived strengths and weaknesses of MGP?
- What is the perceived impact of MGP?

To answer the above research questions, focus-group discussions and in-depth interviews (described below) were used among various constituents of the MGP program to obtain detailed and in-depth descriptions of the participants' opinions and perceptions.

Focus-group discussions with MGP Students.

To understand students' experiences of MGP, focus groups were conducted among male and female students who had participated in both the 2007 summer and 2007–2008 after-school MGP programs. Each focus group was conducted in a private location at the school the students attended and was facilitated by either a trained researcher from Johns Hopkins School of Public Health (JHSPH) or the site director of that particular MGP partnership.

In total, 17 focus groups were conducted among the eleven partnerships: seven focus groups among girls, six among boys, and the remaining four among mixed groups of boys and girls. The following is a listing of these focus groups: Canton girls; Canton boys, Roland Park Country School girls, Garrison boys; Garrison girls, Frances Scott Key girls, Frances Scott Key boys; Connexions (mixed gender); Hampstead Hill (mixed); Mt. Royal (mixed); Winston boys; Winston girls; Collington Square boys; Collington Square girls; City Springs boys; City Springs girls; and Calverton (mixed). The only school that did not have focus groups conducted among its MGP students was New Song, as the MGP program was undergoing many administrative and logistical changes.

The interview guide for the student focus groups was developed by a collaborative effort between the JHSPH research team, and the MGP program and site directors. All focus groups were tape recorded and transcribed.

Focus-group discussions & in-depth interviews with parents.

To understand the parent perceptions of MGP, parents from each of the 11 MGP sites were recruited to participate in either a focus group or in-depth interview.

A total of six focus groups were conducted among parents, and in one site (Garrison middle school), five parents were interviewed separately by the site director. The majority of parents who were interviewed were mothers, although a total of four fathers did participate in the focus groups in Canton (one), Frances Scott Key (one), and Winston (two). Four MGP sites did not conduct focus groups or interviews

with parents (Mt. Royal, New Song, Connexions, and City Springs) because of various logistical and

administrative problems that occurred over the spring and summer.

In-depth interviews with project directors.

A total of 23 in-depth interviews were conducted over a five-week period in January and February of 2008 to understand MGP from the perspective of the project directors and site directors. Only two directors did not participate after repeated follow-up phone calls and emails. One of these was a public school site director; the other was a co-project director at an independent school.

Phone interviews with MGP board members.

MGP board members were also invited to participate in a phone interview to understand their opinions and perspectives about MGP. All fourteen board members and the director were emailed about participating in an interview.

Learning what works: the process evaluation

Process evaluations are conducted during program implementation to provide information that will strengthen or improve the program being studied. Only with this knowledge can programs make the necessary improvements needed to achieve their intended outcomes.



The executive director of MGP (Beth Casey) was also interviewed face-to-face about her experience in serving as the executive director of MGP.

Student Surveys

Another aspect of the evaluation was to understand the learning and family environment of the MGP students. Specifically, we wanted to know whether there were any specific factors that were related to learning among students enrolled in MGP in an effort to possibly build on these factors in the overall design of MGP. To address this, we conducted student surveys in the summer of 2007. We also collected attendance data to help us understand which students were actually participating in MGP activities.

All MGP students were invited to participate in a survey administered during the first or second week of the summer program. Parental permission and adolescent assent were obtained before administering the survey. The surveys were taken on computers, with students listening to the questions through headphones to aid interpretation and provide confidentiality. The analyses were restricted to public-school students who participated in the summer program for more than four days. There were a total of 387 students who had attendance data and participated five or more days in the summer program. Of these, 72% (277) completed surveys. Reasons for non-response included not turning in a consent or assent form, not being available on the day of the survey, and the loss of 14 surveys at one site (Towson/Calverton) due to computer problems.

The surveys asked students to report on several domains, including learning engagement and motivation, attitudes toward learning and studying, perceived competency, health risk behaviors, and mental health.

To determine whether the students who took the survey (n=277) were representative of all MGP students who attended the summer program (n=387), algebra test scores and attendance were compared between those who did and did not take surveys. Surveyed students did not differ statistically on either test scores or attendance from students who were not surveyed. The mean attendance for surveyed and non-surveyed students was 19.4 and 18.4 days, respectively. The mean algebra pretest scores for surveyed and non-surveyed students were 6.27 and 5.88, respectively. This suggests that the sample of surveyed students appears to be representative of all MGP students who attended the summer program, at least in two key areas of importance to the program: attendance and algebra test scores.

Outcome Monitoring

The second phase of our evaluation was monitoring of progress in algebra skills among MGP students. For this phase, we had two research questions: 1.) Did the participants in MGP improve their algebra skills over the course of the summer? and 2.) Did MGP students improve their scores on standardized assessments and school attendance?

Impact Evaluation

An impact evaluation determines whether any changes observed can be attributed to the program. In this evaluation, the outcome monitoring shows student progress, but is not capable of assessing whether that progress is due to students' participation in MGP.

**Table 2: Description of Data Collected for the Evaluation**

Source of Data	Data Collection Method	Measures
MGP students	Focus groups	Perceptions on MGP (i.e., what they liked about the program; what they didn't like; suggestions for improvements; the impact of MGP on their lives)
	Survey	Learning engagement and motivation; parent engagement in homework; perceived competency; health risk behaviors; mental health
	Pretest/posttest	Assessment of algebra readiness
	Baltimore City Public Schools provided administrative data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demographic data • Attendance • Suspensions • MSA scores • Terra Nova score • Composite score
Parents of MGP students	Focus groups; in-depth interviews	Perceptions on MGP (i.e., what they liked about the program; what they didn't like; suggestions for improvements; the impact of MGP on their child's life)
Project and site directors	In-depth interviews	Perceptions on MGP (i.e., what they liked about the program; what they didn't like; suggestions for improvements; opinions about partnership and leadership)
MGP board members	Phone interviews	Perceptions on MGP (i.e., what they like about the program; the challenges they face as board members; vision of MGP; vision of board)



Results of the Survey: Who are the MGP Students?

The first data collection activity undertaken as part of the evaluation was the student survey. This was an important piece to understanding the learning and family environment of the students enrolled in MGP.

Summary of Key Findings

- A large proportion of MGP students (72%) live in single-parent households or without their biological parents present in the household.
- MGP students have a high level of self-efficacy for being able to do well in school.
- MGP students perceive that their parents/caregivers place value on their education.
- MGP students who believed their parents/caregivers knew the value of their education were more likely to believe that they, themselves, can do well in school.
- More than half of MGP students (57%) reported being a victim of verbal or sexual harassment during the past year.
- Nearly half of MGP students (44%) have a friend who is a gang member.
- More than two-thirds of MGP students watch more than 3 hours of TV per day; 41% play more than 3 hours of video games per day.
- MGP students who had friends in gangs were less likely to have positive attitudes about academics; MGP students who watched more TV and played more video games were also less likely to have positive attitudes about academics.

Who Are the Students Enrolled in MGP?

MGP participants are demographically similar to other public-school students in Baltimore City. The majority of students who took the survey were males (62%) and between the ages of 11 and 14 years of age (23% were 11 years, 38% were 12, 24% were 13, and 10% were 14 years of age). Most were African American (84%), with the white and Latino students clustered in a small number of programs. Approximately one-fifth (21%) lived with both biological or adoptive parents, 48% lived with a single parent, and 7% lived in a step family. The remaining 24% of students resided with neither parent but instead with other

family members such as grandparents, aunts, and uncles, or with no family members.

Student engagement in learning and parent support for education.

Most people's views and attitudes about their work are complex and variable, shifting from day to day depending on what is happening at the office and how engaging their work is at the time. Similarly, students' views about school and learning are complex and variable. For this reason, researchers typically develop measures of students' engagement in learning that consist of combining answers to several survey questions. The measures, called scales, are generally more reliable and valid than single questions.

The survey included seven scales measuring different dimensions of students' engagement in school and their parents' involvement in their education. These seven scales were originally developed by educational researchers to understand academic motivation and engagement among middle and high school students. We assessed the reliability of each scale among MGP students and adapted the scales as necessary. The source of the scales and an assessment of their reliability among this sample are described in detail in Appendix A. In addition, students' responses to the individual questions comprising the scales by gender and grade level are presented in Appendix B.

Student Effort

This scale measures the extent to which students believe that they are capable of doing well in school if they try academically. The scale was created by summing students' responses to the following three statements:

1. I know how to keep myself from getting bad grades.
2. I can work really hard in school.
3. I'm pretty smart in school.

The response categories to each question were "not at all like me," "a little like me," "mostly like me" and "very much like me." The response "not at all like me" was given a value of 0, "a little like me" was given the value 1, "mostly like me" was given the value 2 and "very much like me" was assigned the value 3.



The scale, consisting of the sum of the students' responses to the three questions, ranges from 2 to 9, with higher values indicating higher student effort. The mean effort score from the survey was 8.1, indicating that MGP students strongly believed they knew how to do well in school. This was true for all sites, as the mean scores did not differ across the 11 sites. The mean effort score for males, 8.3, was significantly higher than the mean effort score for females, 7.9, suggesting that boys enrolled in MGP had slightly higher perceived efficacy about their academic abilities than the girls.

Engagement in Homework.

Engagement in homework measures the extent to which students are intrinsically motivated to do homework. It is measured by summing students' responses to the following four statements:

1. I do my homework because I like to do it.
2. I work on my class work because it's interesting.
3. I do my homework because it's fun.
4. I do my homework because I want to learn new things.

The response categories are the same as for the student effort scale, ranging from "not at all like me" to "very much like me."

The scale ranges from 0 to 12, with higher values indicating more intrinsic motivation to do homework. The mean score on the survey was 6.5, indicating that, on average, MGP students' responses fell between "mostly like me" and "a little like me." The mean scores did not differ across the 11 program sites, indicating that there were no sites that had more motivated students than other sites. The mean score also did not differ statistically between males and females.

Attitude toward academic (in-school) reading.

Students' attitudes about reading during school were measured by summing students' responses to eight questions from the Elementary Attitudes toward Reading Scale (ERAS). Examples of the academic reading items include "How do you feel about reading in school?" "How do you feel about the stories you read in reading class?" and "How do you feel about reading your school books?"

Response categories ranged from "I really don't like that" (0) to "I like that a lot" (3). The scale ranged from 0 to 24, with a mean of 16.2. Thus, on average, students were quite circumspect about their enjoyment of reading at school, with the mean response indicating that academic reading

was liked "a little bit." Males and females had similar attitudes toward academic reading of liking it "a little bit." The mean scores for males and females were 16.9 and 15.7, respectively. The mean scores also did not differ across site.

Attitude toward recreational reading.

This scale focuses on students' attitudes about reading that is not required by school. It was created by summing responses to ten questions such as "How do you feel about reading for fun at home?" "How do you feel about spending free time reading?" and "How do you feel about reading different kinds of books?" The response categories are the same as for the academic reading scale. The scale ranged from 0 to 30, with a mean of 18.6.

Students who liked recreational reading were more likely to report enjoying reading in school (correlation = 0.61), suggesting that enjoyment of reading extends beyond context. As with academic reading, the mean scores for recreational reading did not vary much across site. The mean score, however, did differ by gender. Unlike with academic reading, female students had slightly more positive attitudes toward recreational reading than males, with mean scores of 19.3 and 17.6, respectively.

Parental engagement.

Three measures assessed the extent to which MGP students perceived that their parents tell them school is important and that they are expected to do well. The first, communication of values/expectations, assessed the extent to which MGP students perceive that their parents tell them school is important and that they expect their child to do well. The students were asked, *Please state how often during the past year...*

1. someone in your family explained why school is important.
2. someone in your family talked with you about how schoolwork is related to what you are learning.
3. someone in your family made it clear what they expect of you in school.

Response categories are "never," "less than once a month," "once a month," "once a week," "a few times a week," "daily." The scale ranges from 0 to 15, with a mean of 12.2, indicating that, on average, students said their parents communicated their expectations about school a few times a week.

Clearly, MGP students were hearing the message from



their parents that they are expected to do well in school and that school is important. This was true for students in all 11 MGP sites and for both boys and girls.

Another measure aimed to capture students' perceptions of their parents' *involvement in their learning*. Students were asked how often the following occurred:

1. Someone in your family helped you study for tests.
2. Someone in your family read with you.
3. Someone in your family spent time reading with you.
4. Someone in your family supervised your homework.

Response categories were the same as for the previous measure. The range of the scale was 0 to 15, with a mean of 7.7. Interestingly, this mean was substantially lower than the mean for parental communication of values and expectation. On average, parents told their children about the importance of education much more frequently than they actively engaged with their children in studying, reading, or supervising homework. This finding was consistent for both males and females, who had mean parental involvement scores of 7.8 and 7.9, respectively.

Notably, students who reported that their parents communicated the importance of school or are involved in their learning were also more likely to report they themselves are motivated to do homework.

Health and safety.

The survey also revealed that many of the MGP students face real dangers in regards to their health and safety at home and in school. At least half of the students said some form of victimization had occurred at least once during the six-week period before the survey. Six types of victimization were asked about on the survey: being made fun of, having personal property damaged, having something stolen, having something taken by force, being physically threatened, and being physically attacked.

Students were also asked about sexual harassment at school, which was defined as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. Fully 57% experienced at least one type of sexual harassment in the last school year, with boys being slightly more likely to report sexual harassment compared to girls (57% for boys versus 51% for girls). A large proportion of MGP students had some sort of connection to a gang as well. While most of the students in MGP did not actually belong to a gang themselves (97%),

approximately 69% knew someone in a gang and 44% had a friend who was a gang member.

Media consumption.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends a maximum of two hours of quality TV programming per day. On the survey, two items assessed students' media consumption: hours spent watching TV and hours spent playing video or computer games on an average school day. Notably, more than two-thirds of the students reported watching more than three hours of TV per day, and approximately 41% reported playing video games for more than three hours per day.

What is the relationship between health risk, victimization, and academic measures?

In this sample, victimization (sexual and physical) was not correlated with any of the educational measures. In other words, the experience of physical or sexual harassment did not appear to deflate engagement in education for these students or perceptions of their parents' engagement in their education.

However, we did find a strong relationship between victimization and sexual harassment, indicating that students who were physically victimized were also more likely to be sexually harassed. While victimization did not differ by school attended, students' report of sexual harassment did significantly differ by school attended, indicating that sexual harassment is more common in some schools than others.

Those who reported spending time with friends who are gang members were also more likely to report spending time watching television and playing video games; negative attitudes towards academic reading; and having been sexually harassed.

Research has already shown that excess television viewing and, to a lesser extent, playing video games negatively affect academic performance². These findings were supported by the sample of MGP students. ***Students who reported more television viewing and video or computer game playing also reported reduced student effort and less positive attitude toward academic reading, and recreational reading. Additionally, students who reported more television viewing reported less parental involvement in learning.***

² Chernin, AR and Linebarger, DL. The Relationship Between Children's Television Viewing and Academic Performance. *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med.* 2005;159:687-689.



Findings from the Outcome Monitoring

Summary of Key Findings

- Students' performance on the algebra pretest in 2007 cannot be attributed to their prior engagement in learning or their parents' involvement in their learning. Students who were more academically motivated, who enjoyed reading, and who had parents involved in their education did no better on the pre-algebra test than did students who do not enjoy these benefits.
- Little of the difference between student algebra pretest scores in 2007 was due to the school they attend. The one exception was Francis Scott Key Middle School, which either used a different selection criteria for MGP students (i.e., selecting only the highest achieving students); better prepared students in 6th grade for algebra compared to the other schools; or served a population of students better prepared for algebra upon entry into the 6th grade.
- Students' academic engagement, including parental attitude, did not influence attendance in the program. Moreover, attendance was not related to students' experience of victimization in their public schools; however, students who reported spending time with friends in gangs attended fewer days during the summer program.
- Attendance in MGP varied significantly by site and a large proportion of the variance was due to site, even when analyses excluded sites where attendance might not have been accurate. ***This indicates that MGP sites had a lot of ability to influence attendance.***
- Over the course of the summer in 2009, MGP participants demonstrated substantial gains in pre-algebra skills. Because these gains occurred during the summer, when students were not in school, ***these gains are almost certainly due to MGP.***
 - The gains occurred for both boys and girls and for students in all grades.
 - The gains were highly uneven across partnerships. Students in a handful of sites made stunning gains.
- Trend analysis of MSA scores, school attendance, and high school composite scores revealed:
 - The percent of MGP students who scored “basic” on the math MSA increased after participation in MGP during 2007–2008. This pattern mirrors a

citywide trend of increasing failure rates on the math MSA scores during middle school.

- In contrast, reading MSA performance improved after participation in MGP during 2007–2008.
- MGP participants did not have higher school attendance after participation in MGP.
- There was no improvement across years in the composite scores calculated to determine admission to city-wide schools.

Student Pretest Scores – Summer of 2007

During the first week of class in June of 2007, the students were administered a five-item test to assess algebra readiness. Students' test scores were calculated by summing the results of the five questions, resulting in a possible range of 0 to 17. The summary pretest scores were submitted to MGP by the test developers. The average pretest score was 6.3 (s.d. 3.9) for the 248 students who took both the pretest and the baseline survey in the summer of 2007. This relatively low score suggests that, at the start of the program, many MGP students did not yet have the pre-algebra skills deemed necessary for success in high school algebra.

The pretest scores ranged from 4.00 to 10.23, indicating substantial variability in skill levels across the sites. This variability is not surprising given that each site was allowed to create its own selection criteria.

Most educational research finds that students who are more highly motivated, who enjoy learning, and who have families involved in their education do better on achievement tests. We did not find that pattern. Table 3 shows the correlations between the pretest score and seven measures of academic engagement. Correlation coefficients below 0.20 suggest that the variables are not strongly related.

Student Attendance in MGP

Student attendance in the 2007 summer program was recorded by MGP staff and submitted at the end of the summer. Whereas the pretest and the survey data measured



student characteristics at baseline, the attendance data is a measure of their involvement in the summer program itself. We explored whether pretest scores or academic engagement measures predicted attendance in the summer program of 2007.

The table below (Table 3) shows the correlations between attendance at MGP and eight measures of academic engagement (including pretest scores). With the exception of pretest scores, all of the correlation coefficients were 0.1 or below, which indicates very weak or no correlations between attendance and academic engagement. In other words, the academic attitudes and motivations that students

Student Pre- Post-Algebra Test— Summer of 2009

Another pretest was administered to 445 students in June 2009 at ten sites, followed by an identical posttest administered in August 2009. It is important to note that this test only assessed summer learning in 2009 and did not capture learning during the school year.³

The posttest was administered to 380 students. A total of 344 students took both the pretest and posttest. Students missing one or both assessments were more likely to be in

Table 3. Correlation Coefficients Between the Educational Scales, Pretest Scores and Attendance*

	Student Effort	Engage in HW	Academic reading	Recreation reading	Communicate values	Involvement in learning	Attendance at school events	Test Score	Attendance
Student Effort	1.00								
Engagement in Homework	0.31	1.00							
Academic Reading	0.25	0.49	1.00						
Recreational Reading	0.11	0.35	0.61	1.00					
Communication of Values	0.12	0.18	0.29	0.23	1.00				
Involvement in Learning	0.23	0.33	0.33	0.20	0.44	1.00			
Attendance at School Events	0.19	0.17	0.16	0.10	0.41	0.53	1.00		
Test Score	0.12	-0.06	-0.05	0.12	0.03	-0.08	-0.08	1.00	
Attendance	0.07	0.01	0.07	0.09	-0.03	-0.10	0.01	0.16	1.00

*The numbers in bold are statistically significantly greater than zero ($p < .05$).

arrive with into MGP did not influence attendance in the summer program. Attendance was weakly but significantly correlated, 0.16, with pretest scores, indicating that students with higher test scores had slightly better attendance.

Finally, we calculated the mean attendance by summer sites as well. Mean attendance by site ranged from 13.6 days to 23.4 days across the sites. Using a statistical technique called the intraclass correlation, we determined that 51% of the difference in attendance was due to the differences of the summer sites as compared to the students' individual characteristics. In other words, we found that the high attendance depended on the specific actions that programs took to foster attendance and was not explained by the initial levels of motivation or engagement of the students.

their first year of MGP. Only 56% of students who enrolled in 2009 had complete data, compared to 71% of students who enrolled in 2008 and 63% of students who enrolled in 2007. There were also differences in response rates across partnerships.

The possible scores on the tests range from 0 to 12. The average score on the math test rose from 5.1 at pretest to 6.5 at posttest. This is a substantial effect given that the

3 Originally it was planned to assess the growth of students who took the pretest in June of 2007 to 2009. However, a series of actions by the test developers (change of the content of the test between pre- and posttest; change in scoring strategy; and loss of surveys, which made rescoring infeasible) precluded assessment of growth over two years. These events also precluded a deeper exploration of which students benefited most from the MGP summer program because the survey data was collected in 2007.



program contained just four weeks of academic content. Boys and girls improved at equal rates on the pre-algebra test. Students of all grades also improved at equal rates. Results did not vary by gender, grade or year in which the student first enrolled in MGP.

However, the extent to which students improved their math skills varied substantially across partnerships. One partnership lost ground on the test, with students declining an average of 1.5 points between pretest and posttest. At the other extreme, one partnership demonstrated gains of 4.7 points between pretest and posttest.

In addition to changes in overall scores between pretest and posttest, we examined the consistency with which students answered questions correctly. At pretest, there was only a modest correlation between how well students did on one question with how well they did on another question (average inter-item correlation = .29). At posttest, students' performance was more consistent across the test, meaning they tended to do well on all questions or poorly on all questions (average inter-item correlation = .46). The fact that a student's performance is more consistent across the tests, along with the fact that, on average, they showed improvement in the mean score, suggests that they are developing a coherent set of math skills.

Outcome Monitoring: Trends in Administrative Data

As part of the process evaluation, we looked at the academic status of MGP participants as monitored and reported by the Baltimore City Public School System (BCPSS). For the students enrolled in MGP during the summers of 2007 and 2008, we obtained all demographic and academic data available for the 2000–2001 to 2007–2008 school years from the BCPSS. This data includes: attendance rates, MSA scores, Terra Nova math and reading scores, and grades. We compared the data year-by-year to get a simple trend in academic outcomes for the MGP students.

Before presenting the trend data, two major limitations should be noted. First and foremost, one cannot make any conclusions about the effectiveness of the MGP program based solely on a trend analysis. For example, a data trend may show no improvement over time in a particular outcome, but this trend could mask the fact that declines would have been more severe had it not been for participation in MGP. In order to assess program effectiveness, we need to answer the counterfactual question: *What would have happened to these exact same students if they had not participated in Middle Grades Partnership.* The trend analysis does not do this.

Second, to date BCPSS has not provided complete data for the 2008–2009 academic year, precluding our capacity to report academic status post-MGP for students who enrolled in MGP in the summer of 2008. We also cannot compare trends in academic outcomes between students who attended one year and those who attended two years (e.g., summer of 2007 only or summer of 2007 and 2008).⁴ This data limitation also precludes at present the ability to report

⁴ Data from the 2008–2009 school year was not part of the original data request to BCPSS because the original request was made relatively early in the 2008–2009 school year (and delivered in full in late September 2009).

on high school enrollment and performance, since relatively few of the MGP students from the 2007 and 2008 cohorts attained 9th grade by the fall of 2007.⁵

Math MSA Scores

Trends in math MSA scores were explored for 322 students who participated in the MGP summer program at least 5 days in 2007 and had complete data for three years of MSA scores. By restricting our analysis to this group of students we can compare MSA scores the years preceding and following MGP participation. Figure 1 shows the proportion of students who scored basic, proficient, and advanced on the math MSA.

Comparison of the blue and red bars shows the trend in math MSA scores between spring 2006 and spring 2007. Comparison of the red and green bars shows the trend in math MSA scores between spring 2007 and spring 2008, before and after participation in the summer 2007 MGP program. The graph shows a consistent trend towards poorer math performance on the MSA, uninterrupted by participation in the summer 2007 program.⁶ The year-to-year differences are statistically significant. This trend mirrors the general trend among Baltimore City Public School students of declining performance on math MSA scores across the middle-school years.

⁵ An additional data request was made for the high school enrollment status of all students in 9th grade, as of Fall 2009. Although this data was delivered on September 23, 2009, to date we are not confident of its completeness or quality and hence do not present results here.

⁶ A pilot MGP program was conducted in the summer of 2006 and some of the 2007 participants may also have participated the prior summer.

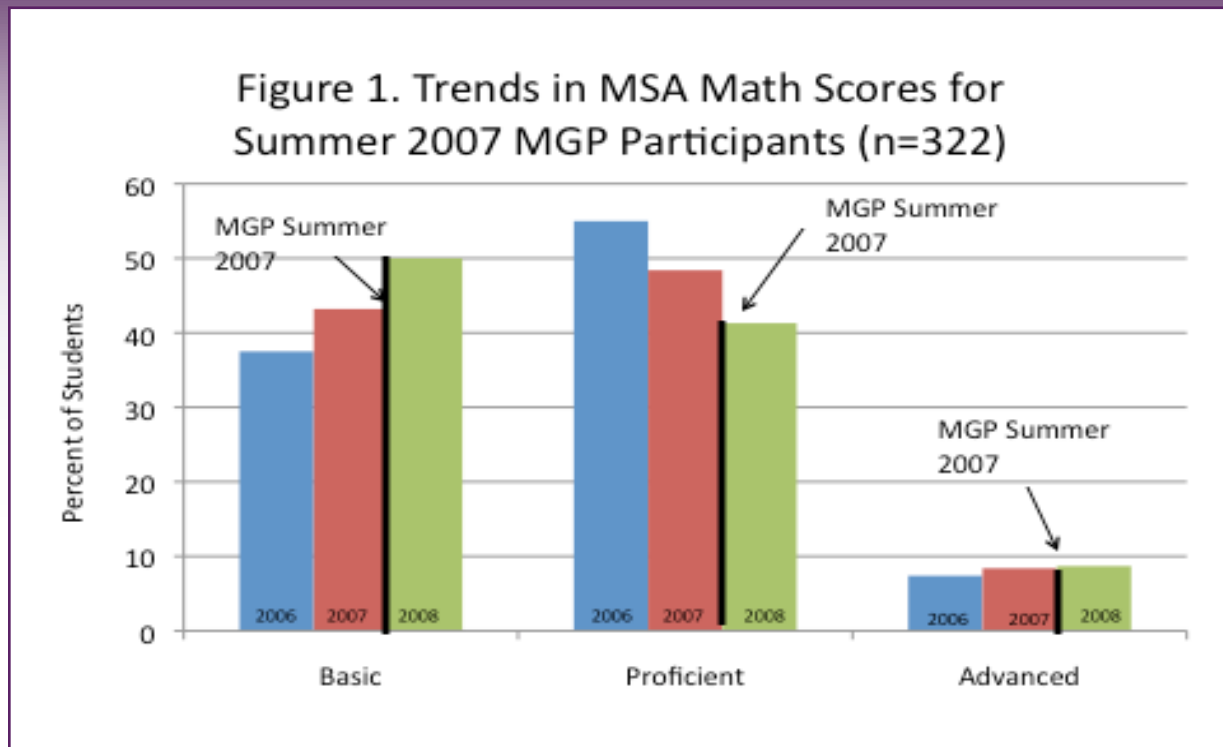


Table 4. Change in Math MSA Scores between Spring 2007 and Spring 2008 (before and after participation in Summer 2007 MGP program) (n=322)

Score 2007 → Score 2008	Number of Students	Percent of Students with Basic Score in 2007
Basic → No change	96	79.3
Basic → Proficient	25	20.7
Basic → Advanced	0	0.0
Total	121	100.0
	Number of Students	Percent of Students with Proficient Score in 2007
Proficient → Basic	42	23.7
Proficient → Proficient	123	69.5
Proficient → Advanced	12	6.8
Total	177	100.0
	Number of Students	Percent of Students with Advanced Score in 2007
Advanced → Basic	1	4.2
Advanced → Proficient	8	33.3
Advanced → Advanced	15	62.5
Total	24	100.0



Figure 2. Trends in MSA Reading Scores for Summer 2007 MGP Participants (n=322)

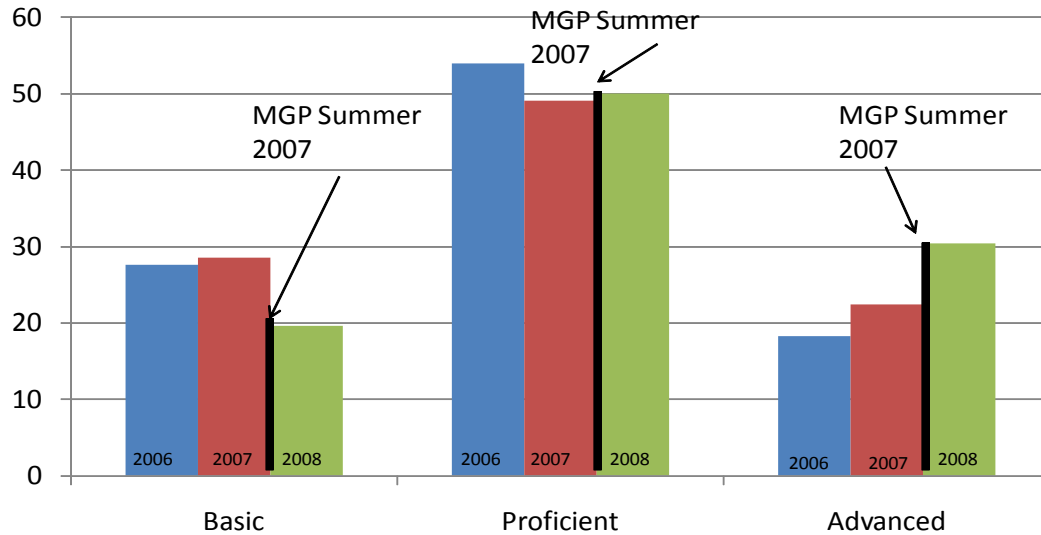


Table 5. Change in Reading MSA Scores between Spring 2007 and Spring 2008 (before and after participation in Summer 2007 MGP program) (n=322)

Score 2007 → Score 2008	Number of Students	Percent of Students with Basic Score in 2007
Basic → Basic (no change)	50	54.4
Basic → Proficient	42	45.6
Basic → Advanced	0	0.0
Total	92	100.0
	Number of Students	Percent of Students with Proficient Score in 2007
Proficient → Basic	13	8.2
Proficient → Proficient	97	61.4
Proficient → Advanced	48	30.4
Total	158	100.0
	Number of Students	Percent of Students with Advanced Score in 2007
Advanced → Basic	0	0.0
Advanced → Proficient	22	30.6
Advanced → Advanced	50	69.4
Total	72	100.0



We repeated the trend analysis for the following subgroups of students: rising 7th graders in summer 2007, rising 8th graders in 2007, students who qualified to participate in summer 2008 as well as summer 2007 but did not, and students who participated in both 2007 and 2008. The magnitude of the decline on math MSA scores across the middle-school years was similar for each of these groups.

Table 4 presents in more detail the math MSA results for spring 2007 and spring 2008. Most students scored similarly on the test in both years. For example, 79% of students whose scores placed them in the basic category on the test in 2006 also scored “basic” in 2007. However, nearly 21% improved their score. Among those who scored “proficient” in 2006, 24% fell to the basic category in 2007 and 7% improved their scores to rise to the advanced category.

Reading MSA Scores

Trends in reading MSA scores were explored for 322 students who participated in the MGP summer program at least 5 days in 2007 and had three years of MSA data. By restricting our analysis to this group of students we can compare MSA scores the years preceding and following MGP participation. Figure 2 shows the proportion of students who scored basic, proficient and advanced on the reading MSA.

Comparison of the blue and red bars shows the trend in reading MSA scores between spring 2006 and spring 2007. Comparison of the red and green bars shows the trend in reading MSA scores between spring 2007 and spring 2008, before and after participation in the summer 2007 MGP program. In contrast to the findings for the math MSA scores, the graph shows a fairly sharp decline in the percentage of students scoring basic on the reading MSA and a concomitant increase in the percentage scoring advanced.

The percent of MGP students scoring “basic” on the reading MSA test declined from 29% to 20% between 2007 and 2008. The percentage who scored “advanced” grew from 22% in 2007 to 30% in 2008. (The year-to-year differences are statistically significantly different from zero.) This pattern diverges from the general trend among Baltimore City Public School students of declining performance on reading MSA scores across the middle-school years.

We conducted the trend analysis separately for rising 7th graders and rising 8th graders in summer 2007. The large increase in the percent that scored in the advanced category

between 2007 and 2008 occurs for students in both grades. Both groups also demonstrated declines in the percentage in the basic category between 2007 and 2008.

Table 5 presents in more detail the reading MSA results for spring 2007 and spring 2008. Most students scored similarly on the test in both years. In contrast to findings for the math scores, nearly half (46%) of students who scored basic in 2007 achieved proficiency the following year. Among those who scored proficient in reading in 2007, 31% achieved the advanced category, compared to 8% who dropped down to basic. This pattern is the opposite to the students’ performance on the math MSA, on which 24% who scored proficient dropped to basic and only 7% improved their scores to achieve the advanced category.

Absenteeism

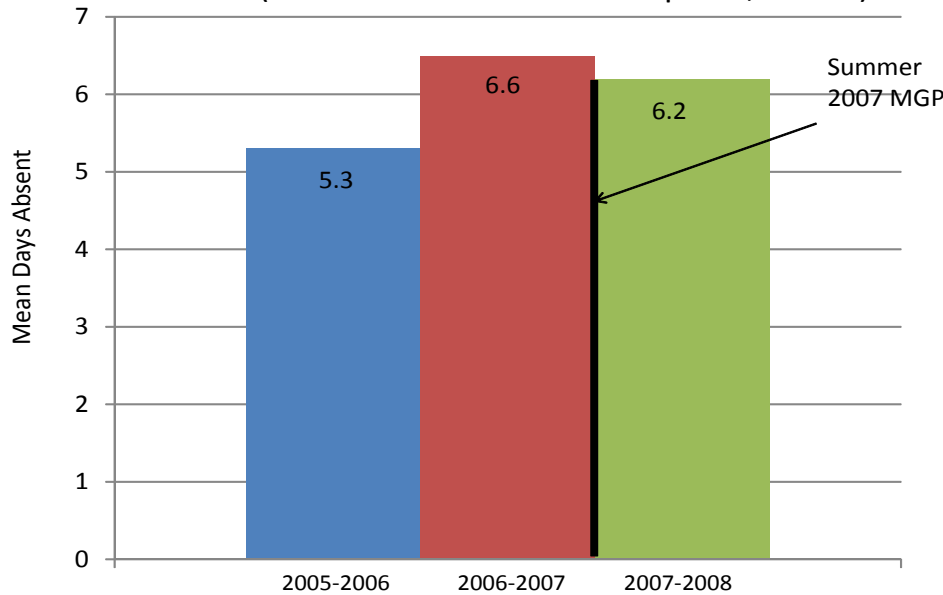
For the process evaluation, we also examined trends in absenteeism, measured as the number of days the students had an unexcused absence during the school year. Figure 3 presents the mean number of days MGP students were absent in the 2005–2006, 2006–2007, and 2007–2008 school years. Between the 2005–2006 and the 2006–2007 school years, the number of unexcused absences increased from 5.3 to 6.6, a statistically significant difference. Between the next two school years, which sandwich the summer 2007 MGP program, there was no change in the mean number of unexcused absences. (Analyses were conducted using repeated-measures ANOVA with adjustments for multiple statistical tests.)

We also examined differences in absenteeism between students who were rising 7th graders and rising 8th graders in the summer of 2007. For this analysis, we conducted regression analyses including controls for program site to account for the differential distribution of grades across public schools (i.e., some partner schools enrolled more rising 7th graders than rising 8th graders in the summer 2007 MGP program) There was no statistical difference in the trend between 2006–2007 and 2007–2008 for the two grade groups.

Without a comparison group, this trend is impossible to interpret. It may reflect no program effect. On the other hand, comparison with an appropriate control group might demonstrate that, were it not for participation in MGP, absenteeism during the 2007–2008 school year would have been even higher.



Figure 3. Trends in Mean Number of Days Absent during the School Year (Summer 2007 MGP Participants, n=322)



- Overall GPA (measured on a 100-point scale)
- English GPA (measured on a 100-point scale)

Three different composite scores are calculated for each student. These three scores give different weight to each of the seven factors. Individual schools select one of three the composite scores and set a cut-point on that score.

The Baltimore Polytechnic Institute uses a composite score that gives heavy weight to the student's math GPA. Baltimore City College, Western,

and Laurence Dunbar High Schools give heavy weight to the student's GPA in math and English. The third scoring algorithm is simply the sum of all seven factors.

Because the high school admissions scores are calculated only one time—in 8th grade—we cannot examine trends. Figure 4 presents the proportion of MGP students who

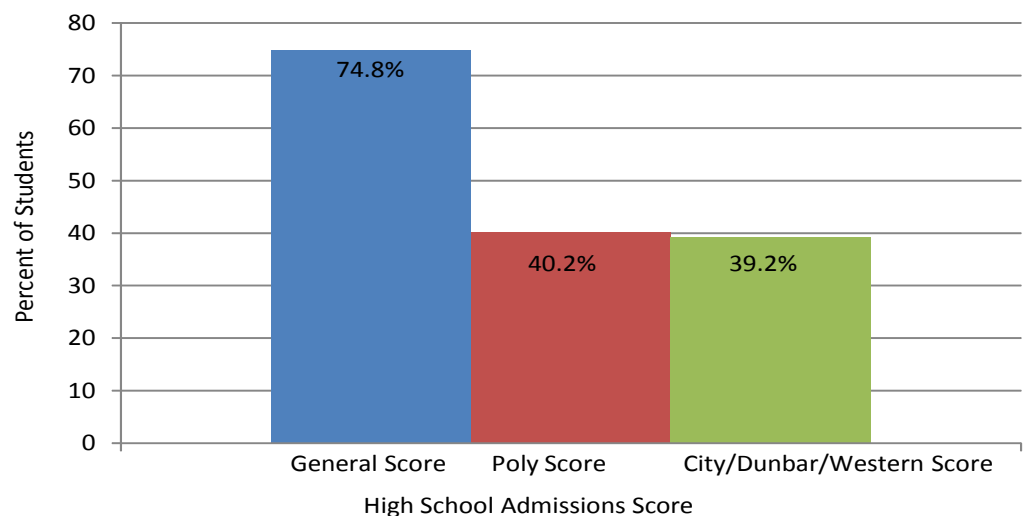
High School Admission Scores

Baltimore has two types of public high schools: those that have an entry criteria and neighborhood schools that have no entry criteria. For all 8th grade students, the Baltimore City schools calculate a high school admission score, also known as a composite score, to determine students' eligibility to attend high schools that have entry criteria.

The high school admission scores are a function of seven factors:

- TerraNova reading score (national percentile)
- TerraNova math score (national percentile)
- Attendance (measured as percent days attended)
- Math GPA (measured on a 100-point scale)
- Science GPA (measured on a 100-point scale)

Figure 4. Percent of Summer 2007 MGP Participants Who Qualify for Citywide High School Admission (n=310)





have a composite score that qualifies them for acceptance into one of the citywide high schools.

On the following page, for reference, we present the distribution of the high school admission scores. Figure 5 reveals a wide distribution in the high school admission scores of MGP participants.

programs before their composite score was calculated in 2009. The second cohort was exposed to the 2007 and perhaps the 2006 summer programs before their composite score was calculated in 2008.

The top panel of Table 6 shows the mean values of the three high school admissions scores. The difference

Table 6. Comparison of Mean High School Scores and Percentage Qualifying for Admission to a City-Wide High School between Two Cohorts: 8th graders in 2008 who attended MGP in 2007 (and perhaps 2006) and 8th graders in 2009 who attended MGP in 2007 and 2008 (n=204).

	Cohort 1: 8th grade in 2008 (n=52)	Cohort 2: 8th grade in 2009 (n=152)	p-value
Composite Score	Mean	Mean	
Polytechnic	580.9	610.5	n.s.
City College	580.3	610.0	.03
General Score [‡]	514.1	548.8	n.s.
	% qualifying for admission	% qualifying for admission	
Polytechnic	28.8	54.6	.001
City College	26.9	54.0	.001
General Score [‡]	78.3	83.3	n.s.
*Note: sample sizes for the general score are 46 in cohort 1 and 131 in cohort 2.			

Among MGP students, the percent of students who qualify for a city-wide high school—and particularly for the schools with the most rigorous entry criteria—has increased substantially over time (personal communication with Beth Casey). An important evaluation question is whether the increase in the proportion of students qualifying for high school admissions is due to increased program effectiveness over time or to some other reason, such as a district-wide trend in increasing test scores or changes in MGP selection criteria over time. This question is difficult to answer without an equivalent comparison group, but we attempt to shed some insight in this descriptive report.

We compared the test scores of two cohorts: 1) students who attended MGP as a rising 7th grader in summer 2007 and continued in the program the following summer, and 2) students who attended MGP as a rising 8th grader in summer 2007 and continued in the program the following summer. Both cohorts attended MGP for at least two years. The first cohort was exposed to the 2007 and 2008 summer

between cohorts is significant only for the composite score used by Baltimore City College, Western, and Laurence Dunbar High Schools. In this case, the younger cohort, who were in 8th grade in 2009 scored slightly higher. The bottom panel of Table 6, however, seems to paint a different picture. Students in the younger cohort were nearly twice as likely to have a score that qualified them for acceptance into the high schools that heavily weight academic performance in determining their entry criteria. They were not more likely to qualify for admission to a city-wide school based on the general composite score.

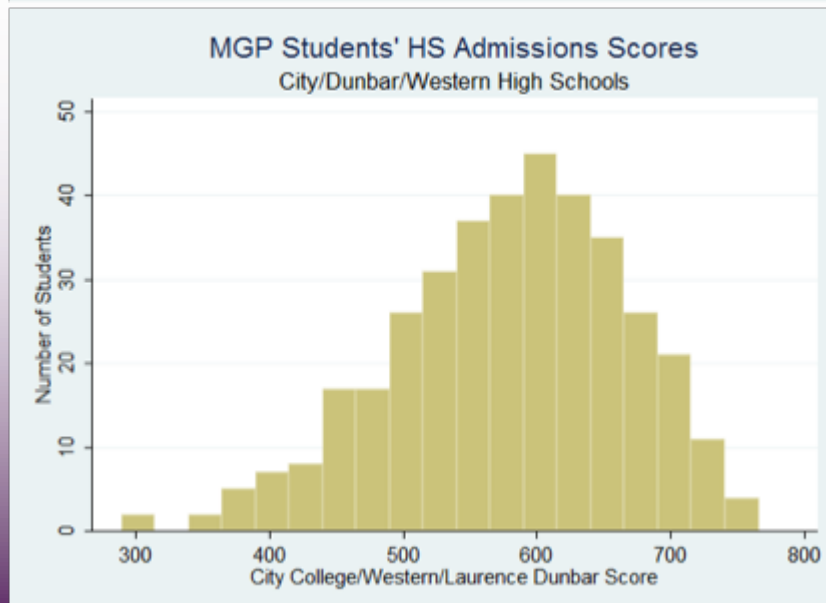
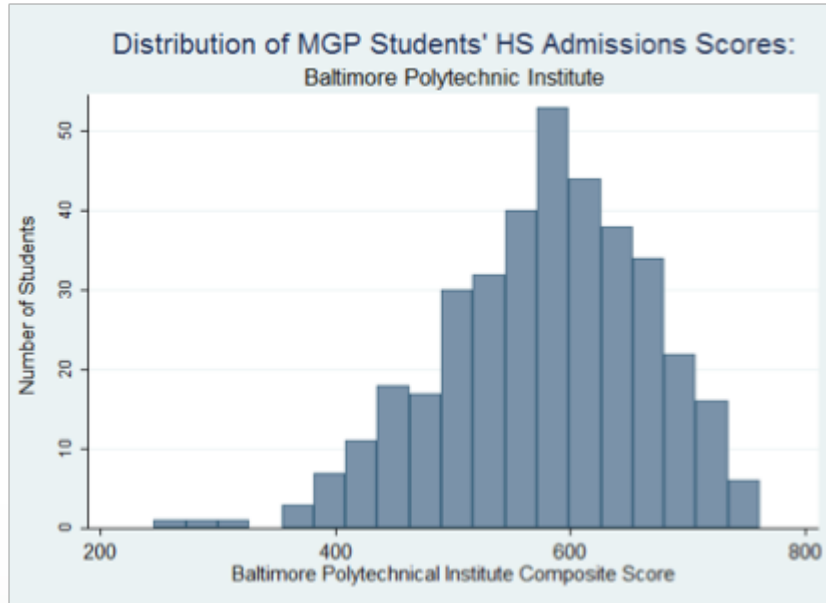
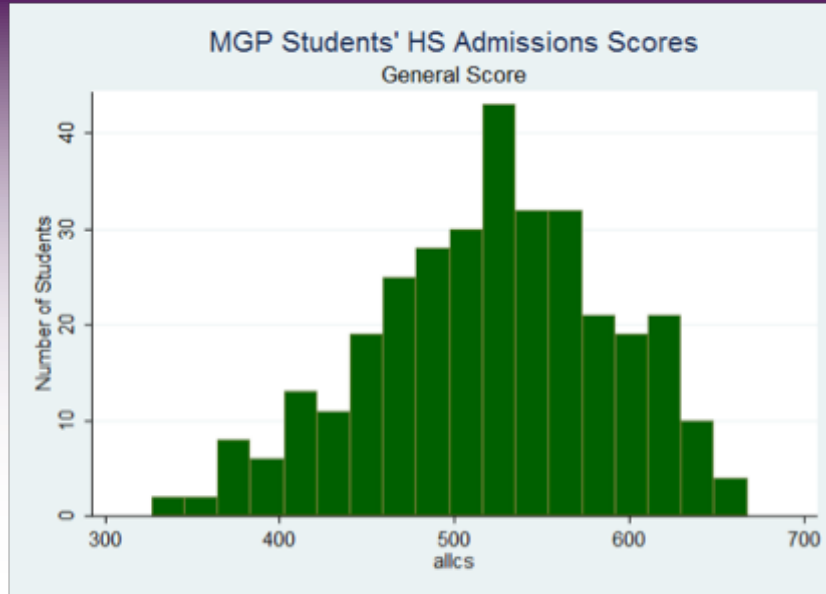
We repeated the analysis comparing all MGP students who were rising 7th graders to all MGP students who were rising 8th graders in summer 2007, regardless of number of years participation in MGP. The results revealed a similar pattern (not shown).

How can there be an enormous difference in the percent of students who qualify for admission to a city-wide high school yet the mean scores across years barely budge? The



Figure 5.

Distribution of High School Admission Scores for Summer 2007 MGP Participants



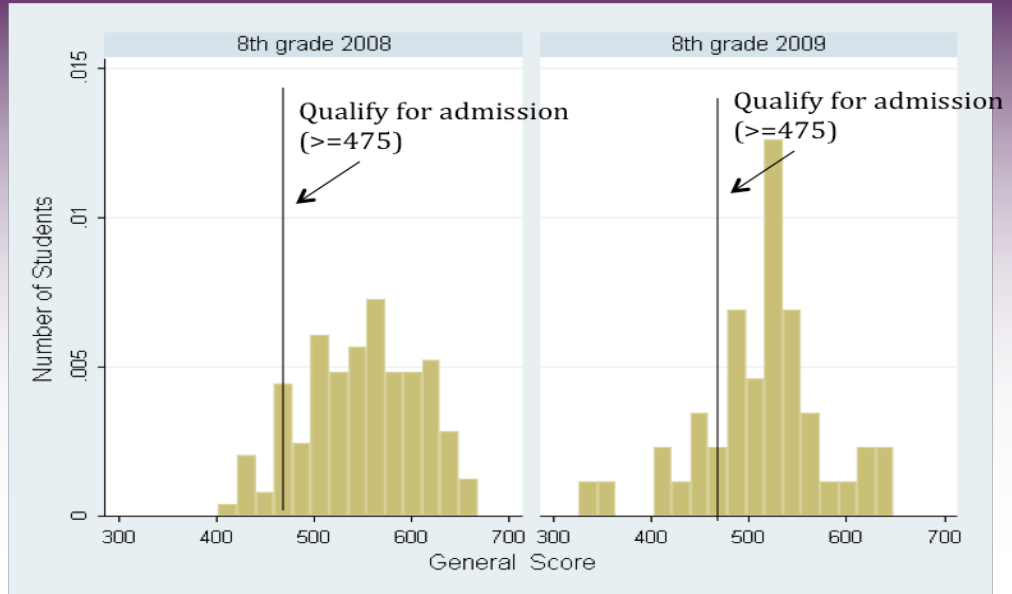
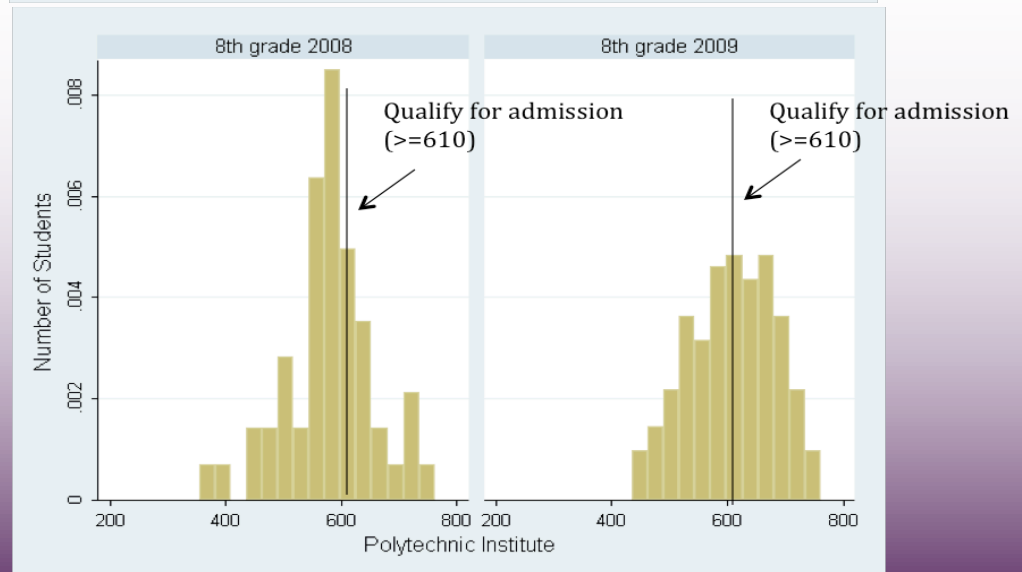
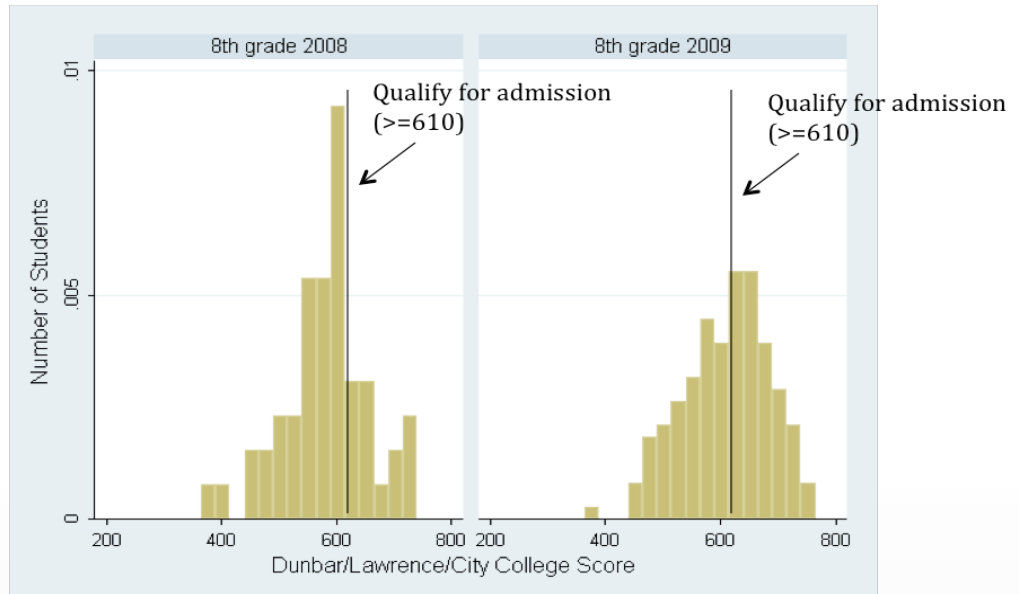


Figure 6.

Distribution of High School Admission Scores for Two Cohorts: 8th graders in 2008 who attended MGP in 2007 (and perhaps 2006) and 8th graders in 2009 who attended MGP in 2007 and 2008 (n=204).





graphs in Figure 6 reveal the answer. Among the most selective high schools, a large number of 8th graders in 2008 had scores that fell just below the threshold that qualified them for admission. The scores among the 8th graders in 2009 were more evenly distributed. Just as the failure to see desired changes in the MSA cut-points may mask real improvements, in this case the use of cut-points artificially magnifies the extent to which the second cohort of students academically outperformed the first cohort. This conclusion in no way diminishes the significance of attaining a qualifying score for the individual students; it does argue for caution for claiming systemic improvements in the schools' abilities to raise high school admissions scores.

Summary

This section of the evaluation report documents the trends in academic outcomes for MGP participants in the summer of 2007. It demonstrates that the citywide trend of declining pass rates on standardized math assessments is mirrored among the MGP students. In contrast, MGP students buck the trend of declining pass rates in reading test scores and show substantial and statistically significant gains in reading. Perhaps not surprisingly, no change is found in attendance rates over the middle school years among this group of high-attending students. Three quarters of MGP students qualify for at least one citywide school in Baltimore, and approximately 40% qualify for the most select schools.

Given that MSA scores, attendance, and high school admissions scores are the metrics by which schools are assessed and funded, it was essential for this evaluation to examine trends in this data. That said, what does the overall pattern of results presented in this section reveal in terms of MGP program success? We begin our discussion of this question with a parable:

One dark night a man was searching the ground, apparently distraught. A passerby stopped and asked if he could help. "Yes, I've lost my car keys," the man said.

"Oh dear," responded the passerby, "Where did you lose them?"

"Over there," responded the man, pointing to a site quite distant.

"Then why are you looking here?"

"Well, because the street light is *here!*"

The goals of MGP articulated by board members, teachers, and MGP staff during the evaluation were the following:

- Gains in pre-algebra skills that predict success in 9th grade algebra
- Gains in reading and writing skills
- High rates of participation and engagement in MGP
- Exposing Baltimore City middle-school students to new learning opportunities and physical environments
- Learning by public and independent school teachers that is incorporated into the school-year.

The administrative data available does not map neatly onto these outcomes. Hence we are looking for evidence of success with data that exists and not necessarily with the most appropriate measures of the outcomes.

Math MSA Scores

The executive director of MGP carefully targeted teacher training and support to promote teaching of a specific set of pre-algebra math skills that are building blocks for high school algebra. In the summer of 2007, there was little consideration in the development of the program of the extent to which these pre-algebra skills are measured by the MSA. Indeed, the extremely low pretest scores on the algebra test developed by MGP consultants suggest that the pre-algebra skills deemed important by MGP were not being taught in Baltimore City middle schools which, increasingly, are tying their curriculum to the MSA content. Given the sequential and building-block nature of math education, it may not be reasonable to expect MGP participation to produce substantial improvements in MSA scores. There was never an intentional effort targeted to producing gains in that outcome. As other sections of the evaluation detail, MGP students showed compelling gains in the algebra skills taught in the summer 2009 MGP program.⁷

Even if the summer MGP program is restructured to align its curricular content more closely with the MSA, the ability to impact math MSA may be limited. The qualitative evaluation revealed that many teachers had limited capacity to integrate the teaching strategies they learned in MGP into the mandated school math curriculum. With the elimination of the after-school component, skills learned during the summer may not be reinforced between September and the spring, when the MSA is administered.

⁷ A pilot MGP program was conducted in the summer of 2006 and some of the 2007 participants may also have participated the prior summer.



Reading MSA Scores

The MSA reading test asks students about word definitions and to interpret the meaning of texts. Reading skills may be more translatable than math skills. In other words, skills learned from interpreting one text may be applied to text on another topic more easily than skills learned from solving one type of math problem (e.g., measuring angles) can be translated to another type of math problem (e.g., calculating areas). If the reading gains demonstrated in the trend analysis persist when future analyses include a control group, specific reasons for MGP's impact on reading vs. math need to be investigated further.

Attendance

There was never intentional programming to improve school attendance by MGP students. The 2008 after-school programs did not systematically provide incentives for school attendance (e.g., cannot attend after-school program unless attend school day), nor was there a concerted effort on the part of the public schools to assign MGP students to teachers they had during the summer program and with whom they might have bonded. Failure to see shifts in this outcome, therefore, is not evidence of program failure. If MGP leadership decides to hold itself accountable to improving school attendance, there should be substantial strategic planning.

High School Admissions Composite Scores

Again, none of the elements comprising the composite scores—GPA, MSA scores, attendance, and TerraNova

test scores—were targeted outcomes for MGP. Indeed, a foundational principle of MGP in 2007 was that it differs from programs that teach to the test; teachers were encouraged to exercise freedom in the design of their own curriculum, and the pre-algebra skills that were of particular focus were not strongly reinforced during the school year due to low attendance in the after-school portion of the program. The data hint at the possibility that as the MGP program evolved between 2007 and 2008 to incorporate clearer expectations regarding academic content, it might have had an effect on composite scores.

In sum, the innovativeness and unique goals of MGP are not well assessed by the standard metrics of educational assessment in Baltimore City. If the future funding and sustainability of MGP depends on producing gains in these outcomes, then the board and program leadership might consider adapting programming specifically to teach to the MSA test and to specifically work with public schools to implement programming that will increase attendance. Several successful models for doing so exist.

We end this summary by repeating the caution with which we began. One cannot use comparisons of trends for the MGP participants to trends for the full student body in BCPSS as evidence of program success; that is, if the reading scores exceed the citywide averages, one cannot conclude it is due to participation in Middle Grades Partnership. Because each site had selection criteria, the MGP students are not comparable to the broader student population. Specifically, programs intentionally selected high-performing or promising students who already had above-average attendance rates, MSA scores, and grade-point-averages.

Findings from the Process Evaluation

Summary of Key Findings

- The elements of a successful partnership include: 1) agreement on the same goals for kids from both the independent and public school directors and teachers; 2) administrative buy-in/commitment from either the heads or assistant heads of schools; 3) established partner roles for each director and teacher involved in planning the curricula and MGP program; and 4) willingness to discuss problems and issues as they arise.
- The primary strengths of MGP, as perceived by students, MGP staff, parents, and MGP board members are the following: 1) exposing inner city students to new environments and teaching styles; 2) increasing students' motivation to learn and improve self confidence, and, 3) establishing a unique model of establishing true partnerships. One board member summarized this well: "Previous programs have usually had a model where the privileged are giving to the less privileged – and its one sided. MGP, however, is about true partnerships."
- The primary weaknesses and challenges of MGP include:
 - The after-school program. Both students and directors felt it was very difficult to be engaged in



an after-school program that was held in the same school environment. Some directors also felt that there was no clear guidance on what the after-school program was expected to achieve.

- Parental involvement. From the perspective of both parents and MGP staff, parents were not being adequately reached for the MGP program. Transportation and scheduling were mentioned as primary constraints for being involved from the viewpoint of parents. Directors, meanwhile, felt that MGP should try to offer skills trainings to parents to get them to be better involved.
- Lack of administrative buy-in from some partnerships. A major challenge is the lack of buy-in for the program on the part of school administrators. Some said principals of certain public schools are the main challenge to their entire program and without their commitment and understanding of MGP, they are not able to select experienced teachers for MGP.
- The perceived impact of MGP, as mentioned by the students, was about how MGP has improved not only their academic skills, but also helped them to achieve more self-confidence, a better sense in problem solving, and an increased ability to interact with people from different backgrounds. Parents echoed the responses of students and overwhelmingly felt that MGP was making a huge difference in their child's life. The impact of MGP was described in various ways, from helping their child improve his/her grades and increasing their desire for learning to increasing their child's level of maturity and ability to be responsible.

For the process evaluation, a variety of different perspectives were incorporated, ranging from focus groups among MGP students, in-depth interviews with the MGP directors, phone interviews among MGP board members, and focus groups and in-depth interviews among parents of students enrolled in MGP. The findings are organized by the questions that were asked using multiple methods.

What are the reasons for participating in MGP?

All students who participated in the focus groups were asked about why they decided to join both the summer and after-school MGP programs. While many students discussed that a main reason for joining both programs was to keep them busy and from getting bored, there were several students who joined MGP to meet new friends and

help them become better prepared in their school subjects. Notably, for the after-school program, a large number of students – across all sites – said that their main reason for joining was to participate in the summer program.

I'll be honest, the only reason why I joined after-school MGP is so I can go to North Bay again next year.
(student)

I joined because I heard that's the only way we can join the summer program.
(male student)

Additionally, a few students felt that the after-school program would be much better than having them go home and watch TV or video games. One boy from City Springs had also heard that the after-school participants would be learning about Shakespeare and that was a good enough reason for him to join.

As for why students joined the summer program, reasons generally fell into three categories: to escape the summer boredom, their mothers or teacher forced them into it, or they wanted to be more prepared academically for the next school year.

I thought it would be a new thing for me and good instead of sitting around the house all day and talking on the phone, listening to music or playing video games.
(female student)

Basically, for me, my mother wanted me to be proactive and be on target for the school year.
(male student)

I joined so that I would be smarter in all of my classes next year.
(female student)

What are the primary goals of MGP?

Directors and parents were asked this question, and their responses are grouped according to their roles.

Project directors' perspectives.

The majority of directors felt that the main goal of MGP was to boost algebra skills among inner-city middle-school students. However, in addition to this, several directors thought that it was also important that through MGP inner-city students were exposed to new environments and places.



The immediate goal is to keep kids excited about learning; to expose them to different ways of learning, and different environments of learning. The long term goal is to create life-long learners and to get them into city-wide high schools and college .

(independent school project director)

A few of the directors also thought that MGP was about connecting the public and independent schools to learn about new pedagogical methods and ways to interact effectively with the students—and this was thought to be primarily bi-directional. Many directors also thought that MGP was an opportunity to reduce the achievement gap between inner-city students in Baltimore and the rest of the student population in Maryland.

Parents' perspectives.

Among parents, most understood that MGP stood for 'Middle Grades Partnership,' and that it was a program in which public schools paired with private schools to promote learning among inner-city students. One mother described the program as one that would “academically try to advance my daughter’s skills so that she could go to a city-wide high school.” Another mother said that when she first heard about the program, she thought it was just a mentoring program where the private schools come to the inner city middle schools. Notably, only one mother who was interviewed admitted that she didn’t really know what MGP stood for or what it tried to accomplish.

What are the strengths of MGP?

MGP exposes middle-school students to new environments and opportunities.

Each MGP constituent—students, directors, parents, and board members—was asked about what they felt were the main strengths of MGP. The dominant theme across all groups was that MGP is successful in exposing inner-city students to new environments and new teaching styles.

Most poor inner city children don't have a notion about what could be different in their lives. MGP provides them with a window for them to see this possibility.

(MGP board member)

Parents echoed this sentiment and expressed their deep appreciation for the new and different opportunities that students receive when participating in MGP. These

opportunities were expressed in terms of both academic and non-academic experiences, from interacting with new students and new environments to taking trips that ‘exposed them to new things’ and ‘broadened their horizons.’ One parent articulated these common themes well:

I love the things that force the children to use their minds outside of their classrooms, which is definitely relevant to life. Book smart is one thing, but being able to apply that to various fields and take what you learn in the classroom outside – is excellent.

(mother)

When students were asked about what they liked best about MGP, the majority described specific activities that were part of the summer program that they found new and exciting.

I loved this one science experiment we did. The penny drop thing was really cool. You got to see how water separates.

(female student)

I really loved playing Math baseball. You had two teams and two captains and if you got a problem right, you got to go to the next base. If you get a problem wrong, you have an out.

(female student)

I loved swimming and the fitness center the best!

(male student)

There were also a number of students from Calverton who remarked at how much they loved learning to play Chess and felt proud that they had learned this complex game.

MGP promotes the desire to learn.

Another strength mentioned by both project and site directors was how MGP promotes a desire to learn and makes learning actually fun for the students.

School and learning can't just be about test scores. It's great to learn for the sake of learning, not because you have to prove yourself with a test score. Students get time to really review the skills they are supposed to be learning in school.

(site director)

MGP creates an atmosphere for students to be life-long learners.

(project director)

**MGP offers a new model for partnerships.**

A few of the directors and board members also remarked on the model of MGP, and the strength of having unique partnerships as the method of operation.

The main strength of MGP is its model of partnership. It's taking the best of both worlds (the public and the independent schools). Previous programs have usually had a model where the privileged are giving to the less privileged – and its one-sided. However, MGP is about true partnerships.
(MGP board member)

Similarly, one project director mentioned that she loved the autonomy that MGP allows for the partnerships.

The directors are given flexibility to create their own programs. It's not mandated from the top-down and no one is telling us what to do or how to do it. It's very empowering to have us decide on how we're going to reach the goals of MGP. It's a philosophy of 'think it, propose it, and we'll fund it.' It's a joy to create and it makes people happy to be a part of.

What is the impact of MGP on students?

Overwhelmingly, students across all focus groups remarked on how MGP has improved not only their academic skills, but also helped them to achieve more self-confidence, a better sense in problem solving, and an increased ability to interact with people from different backgrounds. Below are some examples of the various ways MGP has benefited the students:

I think MGP has helped to calm me and make me feel more relaxed. Before, I would never do sports because I would have embarrassed if I did something wrong. At MGP, we did those activities so much that I really got used to it. Now, in high school, I would like to be on the volleyball team.
(female student)

Before MGP, I never did those hard equations. I never did multiplication and division using big numbers, and MGP taught me how to do it.
(female student participant, City Springs)

From MGP, we all learned about teamwork and following directions... and trust.
(student)

I used to take so much time taking math tests. MGP seemed to have helped me take them much faster.
(male student)

I think it prepares us to be a better person – a better man in life. MGP taught us how to stay strong and not to get along. Before the program, it seemed like we were really mean to each other. Now, we're getting along tight.
(male student)

MGP teaches us responsibility and prepares us for life!
(male student)

Parents echoed the responses of students and overwhelmingly felt that MGP was making a huge difference in their child's life. The impact of MGP was described in various ways, from helping their child improve his/her grades and increasing their desire for learning to increasing their child's level of maturity and ability to be responsible. Some parents described how their child's writing, reading or math skills have greatly improved since being involved in the program. A few parents also described how MGP had helped their children be more sociable and better behaved.

My daughter used to be really into herself and now she's coming out of her shell, being away from home during the summer and meeting new people.
(mother)

My son has calmed down a bit since he's been in MGP. He used to be a little hyper, but I think MGP kind of mellowed him. He's now able to distinguish the forest from the trees.
(mother).

One mother also said that her daughter is attending a Catholic high school this year. She said she didn't think that would ever have been possible if it wasn't for MGP. She said that MGP really pushed her and exposed her to things that she normally wouldn't have been taught or informed about at the public school. Another mother was so proud of the fact that her daughter announced that she wanted to be a pediatrician and wanted to attend Johns Hopkins medical school to pursue her medical degree. She attributes MGP for enabling her to articulate this goal for herself.



What are the weaknesses of MGP?

As part of this evaluation, participants were also asked about the weaknesses and challenges that they faced with MGP, with the expectation that if such weaknesses can be identified, then improvements in the program can be made accordingly. Notably, there were a number of common themes that emerged across the groups.

The After-School Program.

One of the most prominent themes that emerged across all the interviews and focus-group discussions was the challenges associated with the struggling after-school program. Currently, most of the emphasis in planning and preparation goes into the summer program; the consequence is that in each site, there is little room to prepare for a successful after-school program. The majority of participants agreed that this aspect of MGP either needs to be removed or be completely restructured.

A few parents offered some suggestions for the after-school program. For example, one parent said that it would be great if resources, such as the computers and other technological devices that students use in the summer, could be provided for students in the after-school program. Another parent mentioned the idea of having MGP students meet with college students who are taking courses in subjects related to their interests. This interaction could allow them to ask questions about college life as well. In its current form, however, most agreed that the after-school program was failing.

The after-school program makes you want to sleep.

(female student)

MGP really needs to work on the after-school piece of the program. There could be multiple ways to use the money. What does the school need to help the kids? By making it an after-school program, they create competition with other after-school programs. Maybe they could buy the existing after-school program computers or something that would support the learning?

(project director)

Participants in the interviews and focus-group discussions provided several reasons for why the after-school program is unsuccessful. Both students and directors stated that it is very difficult to be engaged in an after-school program after spending at least eight hours in the same school environment. Not only are the students tired, but the

teachers and site directors involved also are tired. Part of the big attraction in the summer program is that students have the opportunity to be in different learning environments; in the after-school program, the majority of the activities take place at the public schools.

The after-school program is seen a bit like an extra chore to the kids occasionally. It's challenging enough to keep the kids engaged after they've been in class all day.

(site director)

Additionally, in many sites, the MGP after-school program has to compete with other extra-curricular activities, and many students are involved in multiple activities. Finally, some site directors did not know what was expected for the after-school program, as there has been very little guidance and structure provided to them for what the program should look like.

Parental Involvement.

Another weakness that was mentioned by several directors was the lack of parental involvement in MGP. Both project and site directors mentioned that MGP isn't doing enough to reach out to parents, and without parental support, the goals of MGP are not going to be accomplished. One project director felt that if MGP wants parents involved, they need to think about developing specific things for parents, such as:

- Offering job-training skill workshops
- Waiving college application fees for their MGP
- Offering college scholarships for students who participate in MGP through high school, and
- Offering GED classes

Without such things, the project director felt that MGP just becomes a summer babysitter for the parents. One site director also felt that parental involvement was key to the success of MGP. She felt that MGP needs to start developing relationships with the parents by addressing the issues that are facing the families of these MGP students:

Issues with my MGP kids run deep. Many have to babysit their younger siblings, fix their own dinner. I have two MGP girls who don't even know about basic hygiene. I had to teach them about the importance of bathing. These issues take them away from their ability to learn.

The site director felt that if MGP was truly interested in helping the students to achieve, they have to start thinking



of ways to address the issues that many parents face, which may mean teaching some parents how to parent.

Notably, from the perspective of parents who participated in the focus groups, one of the biggest challenges that they faced was being *able* to participate in the MGP program. Many parents felt that their work schedules or child care issues prevented them from being involved as they would like. Transportation was mentioned by a few parents as also being a reason for why they miss certain MGP events. At the same time, even if those issues could be resolved, one parent said that there are still going to be parents that never participate in any of their children's events. This person felt that such parents may feel that it is simply not their role, and they have the attitude of 'I didn't go to college or finish high school, why should my child?' When asked whether incentives might help to get more parents involved, parents at Calverton (in particular) felt that incentives would bring the wrong message, and would make it seem as though you have to pay parents to participate in their child's life.

The Lack of Administrative Buy-In.

For directors and MGP board members, a major challenge of MGP is the lack of buy-in for the program on the part of school administrators. Some said principals of certain public schools are the main challenge to their entire program; however, a few also mentioned that BCPS teachers were also difficult to work with and didn't put much effort into the program. According to one board member, *schools that have the buy-in from the administration have been much more involved in selecting the most qualified teachers for MGP. Conversely, in schools that have not had this sense of administrative engagement, the teachers who have been selected for MGP have not been as successful.* In general, the differences in quality observed across the various partnerships is not because of the different curricula in place, but is related to the people who have been selected to work for MGP.

Structure and Guidance for Partnerships.

While nearly all the directors appreciate the flexibility of the MGP program, a few of the directors felt that clearer guidelines were needed for what is expected of them. For example, one director said, *"When I hear about some of the activities that the partnerships are doing, such as the out-of-state tour activities, I ask myself, 'is this something that is expected for our program?'"* Similarly, another project director felt that the central office needed to facilitate a meeting among all the partners to outline what they expect for their summer programs. Such a meeting could cover a variety of different

topics, from what is appropriate discipline to outlining the broad areas that should be taught during the five-week program. Two site directors echoed this request for the after-school programs. In fact, one was worried about Beth Casey visiting her after-school program, *"What exactly will she be looking for?"* Both of these directors felt that some sort of guidebook should be developed that would outline the expectations of the after-school program.

At the same time, it's important to point out that many of the project directors felt that the biggest strength of the MGP program is the ability of the partnerships to develop their own curriculum and program without any bureaucracy of the central office. One project director put it well: *"The program director needs to ask herself how uniform and how independent does she want the partnerships to be."*

What are the key components of the MGP summer program?

The MGP program clearly places most of its emphasis on the summer program. Each director was asked to describe the summer program, the key components of their program, and the lessons that they had learned from the previous summer. In about half the partnerships, summer programming and leadership was implemented by the project directors, while in the remaining partnerships, programming and leadership seemed to be evenly spread between the independent school and the public school staff. Interestingly, while the focus across the partnerships was primarily on algebra, the different channels and methods for teaching algebra was unique to each partnership. One partnership program used a garden to teach most of its topics; another developed math puzzle problems that would require students to use "fun" algebra skills; and another designed a science class *"where the students used math and didn't even realize it."* The activities and trips that were planned were also quite creative and elaborate. One partnership took the students to Boston College; another allowed students to make their own newspaper; some taught drumming; others taught dance classes. The one standard piece of the summer program was that all had planned trips to North Bay, which was viewed as extremely successful.

Since the programs varied so much between partnerships, it was not surprising that when asked about the key components of their summer program, very few directors mentioned similar items. On a broader level, some of the directors mentioned their particular discipline styles as being key to their success:



Point system worked well, where they got points for doing well, and lost points for poor behavior or attendance. Enough points earned them rewards.

(project director)

The discipline approach worked well. Whenever a child acted out they would publicly pull him from his peers and then have a sit down and talk with four staff members and the sole student. They would have a discussion about why the students acted this way and how he could improve. This had a snow ball effect because it got the other students in line.

(project director)

Another key ingredient to the summer program's success was related to how the staff and the students interacted; again, this was translated differently by each partnership.

In the beginning, the staff noticed that the students were not taking the program as seriously as they would have liked. So, they gathered the kids together and asked them: Why are you here? What do you want? This seemed to make a big difference and it made the students feel welcomed as they had their ideas incorporated into the program.

Having a college intern worked well. The kids loved him and they built meaningful relationships with him. The intern allowed them to see a 'cool' young black student in college.

At lunch time, the staff always sat with the students. This allowed the students to have constant interaction with the staff and allowed for their relationships to build.

Finally, directors were asked about the important lessons learned from their summer program. Notably, for a few project directors, a major lesson learned was that students have to be selected more carefully. For example, one project director said that more emphasis was placed on getting enough students into the program instead of using a set of criteria to select the students. This director felt that student selection should be based on attendance, motivation, behavior, as well as parent buy-in. Another project director felt that it was difficult to get the 'right' students into the program, because they were so involved in other activities.

Three sites also mentioned challenges in implementing proper discipline for the students. Most of these difficulties

related to culture clashes between the staff and the students and sometimes between the staff from the independent school and staff from the public schools. For example, one of the project directors discussed that her and her staff from the independent school had difficulty adjusting to the students' attention spans, which were much shorter than the students that they were used to teaching. At another site, there wasn't a clear set of guidance or communication between the teachers and the directors about how discipline should be handled. Staff from the independent school had a different notion about discipline than staff from the public school, and this created a number of clashes.

A few of the directors (both project and site) also mentioned challenges with attendance (primarily from the girls). Most of these directors felt that they needed to establish incentive programs as a means of increasing the attendance among the girls.

What makes an effective partnership?

MGP consists of 11 different partnerships. Each director was asked to describe the partnership, the communication they have within their partnership, and whether they felt it was a true partnership. Most of the directors felt that their partnership was very effective and they had attained a good relationship with the director and staff from the partnered school(s).

One partnership, in particular, seemed to stand out as far as how they communicated and planned for the programs. In this partnership, each director seemed to have a specific role, and they felt that there was no hierarchy of someone wearing the 'director' badge. The director also said that there are key components for their specific partnership: 1) *agreement on the same goals for kids*; 2) *all the directors make an effort to meet to discuss issues*; 3) *all the directors have a willingness to hash out day-to-day routines and be creative in solving problems*; and 4) *there is commitment from both schools*.

Another partnership was also very effective, even though the project director planned most of the program. However, this wasn't viewed as 'independent' versus 'public' but rather that the project director was much more experienced than the public school site director.

However, directors from three partnerships admitted to experiencing a number of difficulties. For example:

I'm not happy with my partnership. The kids get all the benefits and the public schools do nothing. It's all from me down. I feel like I do all the work,



and yet the other directors are getting more money. If it were a true partnership, then I'd get some funding from Baltimore City.

(a project director)

Another project director blamed their partnership difficulties on the MGP central office:

There is little guidance on who is responsible for what and because of that, the BCPS teachers look to us for everything and we get very little input on the curriculum and activities.

Most of the communication between partners occurs through email, and some directors said that they communicate with their counterpart everyday or nearly everyday. A few of the other directors said that while they do occasionally use email, they prefer to meet face to face to discuss larger issues related to their program. One director admitted that she has had great difficulty in contacting the public school site director and feels that the public school site director has dropped the ball in responding to her emails and phone calls.

When asked about how the directors make decisions, most of the directors felt that they made decisions about the program as a team. There were three sites, however, where the project directors felt that they made most of the decisions, despite asking the public school staff for their input.

The role of the MGP central office

The directors were the only group that was asked specifically about the MGP central office, which at the time, was perceived to be primarily consisting of Beth Casey and Ann Daniels. The majority of directors, both project and site, felt that the main role of the central office was to offer support. Many said that the MGP office (Beth Casey) is the heart and soul of MGP and felt she did an excellent job fulfilling her role. They also felt that Beth Casey assisted each partnership in meeting its objectives. Other responses include the following:

- *"The central office is available for questions about anything"* (project director)
- *"It's a place to clarify issues within the partnership. They set a compliance model for MGP directors to follow"* (project director)
- *"Generally in charge of the programs, but are pretty hands off"* (site director)

How can MGP be improved?

When each of the various MGP constituents (i.e., students, directors, board members, and parents) was asked about how MGP could be improved, there was very little overlap. Findings relating to MGP improvements are therefore organized by the particular constituent group.

Directors' perspectives.

Hire full-time MGP staff. To be more effective in building relationships with the public schools and their communities, a few directors felt that the central office needed to hire another deputy director. Such a person would need to have experience in inner-city schools and understand the issues facing inner-city youth. The specific job duties would include outreach in the schools and in the communities to promote MGP, outreach to the parents to help them understand more about the program, all the forms that need to be signed, and offer assistance in helping them get involved in MGP events.

Many directors, especially those from the public schools, acknowledged that MGP can be very overwhelming and some said that just doing MGP alone could be a full-time job for them. In fact, several project directors recognized the increased amount of work of MGP on the public school site directors, and while they would like to assist their partners more, they too, have too many responsibilities. Hiring someone full-time to assist the site directors could be a solution.

Build/renovate a building to be an MGP Center. One recommendation mentioned by two site directors was to have a separate "MGP Center" that could operate during the school year. Both of these site directors felt that the after-school program, in its current form, is not working. One of the site directors explained it in the following way:

Anything that goes into the public schools gets tainted and doesn't keep its current form because of all the issues with the city's public school system. In the schools, everybody is vying for the kids' attention, and they get confused. MGP needs to get a separate building, or a center, that the kids can go to – to escape these issues. The building could also help the community and offer special classes and events for parents as well.

The other site director echoed this sentiment and further explained that a separate building or center for MGP



would offer MGP students the chance to go off campus and allow them to have contact with other MGP students. The center could be staffed by parent volunteers and site directors could rotate taking responsibility for teaching and developing activities for the students.

Increase 'share time' among directors. Finally, many directors expressed that the MGP central office should offer more opportunities for directors to share issues, stories, and key components of success in their programs amongst each other. Some directors mentioned the fact that they knew less than five people's names and felt that they needed more opportunities to not only get to know the other MGP directors, but to learn about what each partnership is doing. At the same time, however, they recognized that requiring additional meetings may strain the already busy schedules of many directors. A potential strategy for this, mentioned by one project director, was to create a monthly newsletter or brochure which could highlight a different program at a time. Although this would help the directors to learn about each other's programs, it wouldn't allow directors the opportunity to get to know each other very well.

Parents' perspectives.

Improve information dissemination. Interestingly, a big issue that emerged across the focus groups and in-depth interviews among parents is how information about MGP is disseminated to the parents. Many parents felt that they weren't receiving enough information about MGP either because the current communication channel was through their child or that they simply were not informed. Most parents who discussed this issue did so in the context of field trips and after-school activities. For example, one parent said that when she dropped off her child at school for the last field trip, there were MGP staff that she had never even seen. "There were men, and I was like, 'who are they?'" Some parents felt that if they received more information, they might even have a chance to offer some suggestions. However, because of the current way that information is being disseminated, parents feel out of the loop. Two parents from Hampstead Hill, for example, had just found out about the after-school program in the focus group.

One suggestion for improving information dissemination, which was mentioned by several parents across the sites, was to send an MGP packet in the beginning of the school year, containing a year-round schedule of all the activities that have so far been planned, a brief description of the MGP staff involved in the program (with contact information on each), and some information about who they could contact for further information and questions.

Many parents felt that such a packet should be mailed directly to the parents, instead of going home with the students as parents voiced frustration in sometimes never receiving the information that is sent home with their children.

Another interesting suggestion mentioned by a parent from Francis Scott Key middle school was to have the MGP students do presentations or exhibits at their school about MGP to enable other students and parents learn more about what the program has to offer.

Students' perspectives.

Since students participate in both the after-school program and summer program, this question of how MGP could be improved was broken down into these two components.

How can the summer program be improved? Interestingly, when students were asked about how the summer MGP program could be improved, many students across sites offered suggestions related to food and food choices.

They need to improve lunch. There were so many dairy products, it made my stomach hurt. I would have liked juice.

(female student)

We should have more cooked food, not just sandwiches.

(student)

I wish they had better drink choices, like soda. We also needed more snacks because the snacks were small and everyone took them and once they're gone, you have to pay for them.

(male student)

Other suggestions for improving the summer program included having more field trips, more indoor activities (as it got hot outside), more time for swimming, shorter class periods, and adding overnight trips. One girl from Frances Scott Key suggested that she would have liked more opportunities to learn about different cultures.

How can the after-school program be improved?

Across all sites, students provided specific suggestions for how they would like the after-school program improved. Above all, the majority of students felt that the after-school program would be most successful if it was held in a different environment, either outside the school building or in a completely different building and school campus.



We need a much more comfortable environment – not just a junky classroom.
(female student)

We have to get out of the same classroom – maybe by having more activities planned outside that involve math and reading.
(female student participant, Collington Square)

Other ideas included getting college interns to help the teachers with the program, offering more hands-on activities, and better snack options. There were also some students who offered new ways of teaching math or Language Arts to them.

We could read a book and then watch a movie on that book.
(male student participant, Collington Square)

We could invent math songs to help us learn those skills. Or have a ‘study party’ to help us learn better study skills.
(student)

A few students from Garrison also mentioned that the after-school program might attract a larger numbers of students if it offered incentives such as showing movies or playing fun games. A number of students from Frances Scott Key also suggested that the Calvert teachers should be responsible for some teaching.

What is the future for MGP?

Directors’ perspectives.

When asked about their vision of MGP, some of the directors were mixed in terms of whether they wanted the vision to be more about academics or about ‘life exposure.’ For example, one project director said, “MGP just can’t be about the data. MGP focuses so much on improving grades, but it’s improving on so much more than that and may those other improvements can’t be measured easily.” Another project director, however, felt that MGP should become the model in teaching talented underprivileged kids to excel in their academic careers.

A few project directors worried that MGP would become too big and bureaucratic; instead, they both felt that MGP should concentrate on tweaking the program in its current form.

For example, one project director offered the following recommendations for the future of MGP:

- Pay 9th graders to keep them in the program (\$100 for perfect attendance which would go towards school supplies)
- Waive the fee for North Bay
- If students attend both graduation ceremonies, they receive \$25
- Develop a better writing program for MGP

Another said, “*there should be more trips and more academic ties to these trips. You still can’t convince me of the purpose of learning algebra. It’s never helped me. I’m not sure how it’ll help them in life. Kids need more exposure to what is outside their immediate circle.*”

Finally, some directors felt that MGP needs to track the MGP students as they go through high school and college. “*If one of the goals of MGP is to get the kids into high school and college and you have no idea if they are there—it’s sort of defeating. MGP needs to know many of the kids make it into a high school and college.*”

Board members’ perspectives.

Most board members, as well as the executive director, think that MGP should first stay focused on perfecting the current program as it is now. For example, one board member felt they should spend time on solidifying the partnerships and identifying the exact roles of the independent schools and the public schools.

While I agree that the partnerships should have autonomy, there should also be some sort of organizational structure so that partners could be accountable to their roles.

There were two board members who thought that MGP should either be replicated in other parts of the country or be expanded to more children in Baltimore. However, this expansion was recognized to be dependent on funding. In addition, there were a few board members who liked the idea of following MGP students into high school, but realized that if that were to really happen, there would have to be changes or cut backs in the current program and all were in agreement that they first have to perfect the program as it is now.



Summary and Conclusions

The results of the process evaluation and outcomes monitoring suggest that MGP is making a difference in the lives of middle school youth in Baltimore.

First, outcomes monitoring revealed that the MGP summer program improved algebra skills among MGP students. Between June and August of 2009, MGP students, as a whole, improved substantially (a quarter of a standard deviation) on a test designed to assess the specific algebra skills deemed important by MGP leadership. Boys and girls both improved, as did rising 7th graders and rising 8th graders. However, there were large differences observed between partnerships. Not all partnerships improved.

Secondly, the student survey, which was administered to MGP students during the summer of 2007, revealed that although the majority of MGP students face numerous risks in their daily lives, they still have a high level of self-efficacy and confidence to perform well in school. Moreover, they also perceive that their parents/caregivers place a high level of value on their education. These are important findings, and reflect the statement that the MGP executive director, Beth Casey, made in an interview, which is: "...all children have the ability to live and thrive, but it's the adults in their lives that have the responsibility to make it happen."

Third, the MGP partnerships achieved high levels of daily attendance in the summer despite the numerous challenges in the young people's lives. Most partnerships achieved high attendance for students at all levels of risk, at all levels of academic interest and motivation, and at all levels of parent engagement in their child's learning. The single most important determinant of attendance was what the teachers did in each site to deliver engaging content.

Fourth, the findings from the outcomes monitoring suggest that the gains in algebra over the summer and the high levels of participation did not translate into gains in the assessments of most concern to the Baltimore City Public Schools: standardized test scores and attendance during the school year. A possible exception to this trend is the reading MSA scores, on which MGP students showed improvement. A potential reason for the lack of improvement by MGP students on math MSA tests and school attendance is that the MGP program was not designed to improve student performance on those

outcomes. If these become the outcomes to which MGP holds itself accountable in the future, the program should be redesigned to strategically target those outcomes.

It is important to note that the trend analysis presented in this report does not assess impact of MGP but rather progress of MGP students.

The process evaluation suggests that, overall, the MGP model is perceived to be working effectively and having a positive impact. Overwhelmingly, students remarked at how MGP has improved not only their academic skills, but also helped them to achieve more self-confidence, a better sense in problem solving, and an increased ability to interact with people from different backgrounds. Parents echoed the responses of students and overwhelmingly felt that MGP was making a huge difference in their child's life. The impact was described in various ways, from helping their child improve his/her grades and increasing their desire for learning to increasing their child's level of maturity and ability to be responsible.

The process evaluation also addressed the question: "What are the strengths and weaknesses of MGP?" Students, parents, MGP staff, and MGP board members all addressed this question, and the following were perceived to be the main strengths of the program:

- MGP exposes inner city students to new environments and teaching styles;
- MGP increases students' motivation to learn and improve self confidence; and
- MGP has a unique model of establishing true partnerships. One board member summarized this well: "Previous programs have usually had a model where the privileged are giving to the less privileged – and its one sided. MGP, however, is about true partnerships."

On the other hand, the primary weaknesses and challenges of MGP included:

- The after-school program. At the time of the evaluation, the after-school program was implemented in the public schools. However, both students and directors felt it was very difficult to be engaged in an after-school program that was held in the same school environment. Some directors also felt that there was no clear guidance on what the after-school program was expected to achieve.



- Parental involvement. From the perspective of both parents and MGP staff, parents were not being adequately reached for the MGP program. Transportation and scheduling were mentioned as primary constraints for being involved from the viewpoint of parents. Directors, meanwhile, felt that MGP should try to offer skills trainings to parents to get them to be better involved.
- Lack of administrative buy-in. For directors and MGP board members, a major challenge of MGP is the lack of buy-in on the part of school administrators. Some said principals of certain public schools are the main challenge to their entire program and without their commitment and understanding of MGP, they are not able to select experienced teachers for MGP.

Directors and board members appreciated the diverse partnerships that have so far been created and believed that the functionality of these partnerships was directly related to the overall success of MGP. However, not every partnership is working effectively, and the process evaluation showed that there are some key components that need to be in place:

- There must be agreement on the MGP goals for students among both independent and public school directors and teachers.
- The heads of the schools, both independent and public, must exert 'buy in' and commitment to MGP.
- The roles of each director and teacher involved in MGP must be clearly established to successfully plan and execute the curriculum.
- Each director and teacher must be willing to discuss problems and issues as they arise.

We recommend two next steps.

First, an in-depth look at the high-performing sites could provide insights that could strengthen the entire MGP program.

1. How are students selected for the sites?
2. What are the qualifications and the skills of the

teachers?

3. What curricula do they use?

4. What do they think are the strengths and weaknesses of their program?

This inquiry could be readily conducted by MGP staff.

Second, we recommend the MGP program choose measures of accountability. If it is important to show improvement in the accountability measures used by the public schools—MSA scores, grades, and attendance—then the program should be adapted to specifically target improvements in those outcomes. If other measures are chosen, then the program components should be aligned accordingly.

To conclude, we'd like to end with some of the more memorable quotes that were taken from interviews of the process evaluation:

I think MGP prepares us to be a better person – a better man in life. MGP taught us how to stay strong and get along. Before the program, it seemed like we were really mean to each other. Now, we're getting along tight.

(male student)

I think MGP has helped to calm me and make me feel more relaxed. Before, I would never do sports because I would have been embarrassed if I did something wrong. At MGP, we did those activities so much that I really got used to it. Now, in high school, I would like to be on the volleyball team.

(female)

Most poor inner city children don't have a notion about what could be different in their lives. MGP provides them with a window for them to see this possibility.

(MGP board member)



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