Explore Middletown
Listening, Learning, and Understanding
Superintendent’s Entry Plan

Dr. Michael T. Conner

Preparing our students for the 21st Century
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Dear Middletown Families, Community Members, and Educational Stakeholders,

I am honored to serve as your new Superintendent of Middletown Public Schools! During my transition, I have met many constituents, city officials, and educational stakeholders who welcomed my family and me with open arms. I want to thank you for making my move to Middletown Public Schools seamless. The positive transition, coupled with a vibrant community, is the rationale I will be making Middletown my new home. Again, thank you for an amazing welcome to Middletown!

I learned a long time ago that good leaders “listen and learn” to understand the complexities of an organization. During my first 100 days in Middletown, I will be executing an entry plan entitled Explore Middletown. My entry plan will feature “Town Hall” forums, “Superintendent’s Night Out” at every school, meetings with various community/government leaders, and school visits so I can gain an understanding of Middletown Public Schools. Leadership is multi-faceted, adaptive, and transparent, which is why I will be listening and learning in the community. My goal is to build transparent relationships with constituents and educational stakeholders of Middletown so we can collectively ensure all students are receiving high quality learning experiences every day. Relationships are at the core of any high performing learning organization—thus, the importance I learn and understand the district from your lens. Interim reports and status updates of Explore Middletown will be provided to the community, as well as “sense making” meetings to share entry plan data findings. I look forward to this collaborative learning process as we inquire and reflect on approaches to improve Middletown Public Schools.

As I stated from the outset, it is truly humbling to join this coalition in Middletown. Thank you for your support and I look forward to growing and learning with you throughout the 2017-2018 academic year.

Regards,

Dr. Michael T. Conner

Michael T. Conner, Ed.D.
Superintendent
Middletown Public Schools
Superintendent Entry Plan

*Explore Middletown*

“Listening, Learning, and Understanding”

**Introduction**

To ensure a successful transition, *Explore Middletown* is an entry plan rooted in collective inquiry and learning. *Explore Middletown* is designed to provide platforms for reflection about our learning organization as well as identify strategic steps to accelerate student achievement. The entry plan is multidimensional that includes meeting with district leadership, educational stakeholders, executive union officials, community leaders/officials, school partners, parents, students, and teachers. Moreover, I will be reviewing our district’s structures, systems, and data to assess areas of progress and improvement.

*Explore Middletown* will be grounded on three critical goals. The entry plan will be implicitly underscored using a “Reflective Inquiry in Action” process that is focused on the following:

1. **Learning About the Community:** The Middletown community plays an active role in shaping a successful school district. During critical phases of implementation, my goal is to learn from our external partners, government officials, colleges/universities, and proponents of Middletown Public Schools.
2. **Learn About My Leadership:** Leadership in the context of guiding stakeholders to a vision is adaptive. All data outcomes and metrics in *Explore Middletown* will assist the framing of my leadership methods to ensure relationships and trust are grounded to improve teaching and learning conditions.
3. **Learn About the Organization:** Every day, educational leaders, teachers, and classified staff of Middletown Public Schools play a critical role in the development of our students. To address our growth areas, as well as strengthen the current structures/systems in place, I will be soliciting your insight on the current state of education in Middletown for ideas to improve our learning organization in a strategic manner.

Thank you for your engagement and participation in *Explore Middletown*. A key lever for our organizational success is having a deep understanding of the current state of education in Middletown and our structured next steps to reach desired academic outcomes. I look forward to meeting you within my first 100 days.
Explore Middletown

Framework and Goals

Framework

Explore Middletown is structured into activities based on five strategic areas within an educational organization. Middletown Public Schools has defined strengths in each strategic area, as well as opportunities to grow. Feedback and data metrics from Explore Middletown will guide the development of our three-year strategic plan. The five strategic areas in the entry plan are outlined below:

1. Governance, Policy, and Board of Education
2. Organizational Leadership, Capacity, and Alignment
3. Teaching, Learning, and Student Achievement
4. Community, Public Relations, Partnerships, and Communications
5. Operations and Finance

Goals

There are five goals in Explore Middletown that are aligned to the five strategic areas of the entry plan. The goals of Explore Middletown consist of the following:

1. Listen and Assess the current state of the school district and core elements of the organization.
2. Learn the school district’s alignment to the five strategic areas of the entry plan.
3. Understand and Unwrap major themes from Explore Middletown to align mental models for organizational coherence.
4. Review data to align priorities to a strategic planning process.
5. Plan efforts for strategic planning and execution.

The first 100 days of Explore Middletown is not an isolated or ad hoc process of learning, but one that explicitly foster dialogue using a collaborative and transparent discovery method. At the conclusion of Explore Middletown, stakeholders and community advocates will participate in semi-structured “sense-making activities” where stakeholders will begin the process for constructing a three-year Strategic Plan. This plan will serve as the guidepost to structure our coalition work for continuous improvement within the Middletown Public Schools.
Explore Middletown

Structure and Timeline

Structure

Explore Middletown is categorized into three critical phases of listening, learning, and understanding. Within the three-tiered process, the first phase will engage stakeholders in structured learning platforms focused on deep reflection, transformational learning, and collective inquiry. The second phase will feature stakeholder groups in “sense-making sessions” of the data from the listen/learn tour. Moreover, during the second phase of Explore Middletown, a “transition team” of external experts will review the organization’s structures, systems, and priorities in selected strategic areas. Targeted recommendations and feedback will be presented to the Board of Education and community. The third phase of the entry plan will start the core work around developing a three-year strategic plan for the district. Goals, strategies, and other essential components of the plan will be introduced, which will coincide with data collected from Phase I and Phase II.

Timeline

**Phase I**
- Listening and Learning
- November, 2017 - February, 2018

**Phase II**
- Learning and Understanding
- December, 2018 - March, 2018

**Phase III**
- Understanding and Strategic Planning
- April, 2018 - September 2018


Explore Middletown

Entry Plan Activities

Strategic Area I: Governance, Policy, and Board of Education

Activities designated in this area are structured to establish proactive/transparent relationships with Board of Education members, outline governance platforms between Superintendent/Board of Education members, and review policies to accelerate student achievement.

Activities:

- Meet with Board Chairman and individual Board of Education members.
- Meet with Board of Education Committee Chairs to determine collaboration and priority focuses for Middletown Public Schools.
- Review existing board policies for alignment to strategic priorities.
- Conduct school visits with Board Members.
- Host a “retreat” with Board of Education members and cabinet leaders.
- Review, establish, and develop mutual Board of Education and Superintendent goals.
- Identify professional development needs and develop a plan to build civic capacity around educational goals and priorities for the district.
Explore Middletown

Entry Plan Activities

Strategic Area II: Organizational Leadership, Capacity, and Alignment

The essential pillar for a district’s success is having a high performing, results-orientated, executive team and senior staff. The focus of this strategic area is to assess the organization’s alignment, efficacy, knowledge, and capacity to address the core priorities of the district. Designated activities in this strategic area will identify critical barriers for performance as well as strength areas that are advancing the organization’s focus on teaching, learning, and innovation.

Activities:

- Review current central office staff structure.
- Conduct one-on-one interviews with central office administrators and review job descriptions.
- Conduct a needs assessment to assess efficiencies, functionality, and efficacy of current organizational structure.
- Examine the level of autonomy principals and schools have with current organizational structure and processes.
- Assess current structures for high-level district and committee meetings.
Explore Middletown

Entry Plan Activities

Strategic Area III: Teaching, Learning, and Student Achievement

The core impetus of any district’s function is teaching, learning, and student achievement. During this strategic phase, activities are developed to listen, learn, and understand the current pedagogical processes for curriculum, instruction, assessment, interventions, resources, and learning.

Activities:

- Meet with district and building level instructional leaders to discuss achievement data, instructional programming, pedagogy, professional learning, and interventions.
- Meet with union leaders, school-based leadership teams and instructional leaders/teachers to discuss current state of education in Middletown Public Schools.
- Meet with custodians and paraprofessionals to discuss current state of education in Middletown Public Schools.
- Host “Town Hall” meetings with community members to discuss current state of education in Middletown Public Schools.
- Host a “Community Breakfast” with city officials and university/college partners to discuss current state of education in Middletown Public Schools.
- Host “Superintendent’s Night Out” with School Governance Councils and Parent Teacher Associations to discuss current state of education in Middletown Public Schools.
- Review performance, perception, and demographic data in Middletown Public Schools.
- Conduct site-visits, lesson observations, and learning walks to assess current landscape of teaching and learning in Middletown Public Schools.
- Meet with Special Education Department (district and school leaders) to discuss and assess current landscape of student services.
- Examine current assessment practices and testing procedures in Middletown Public Schools.
- Meet with Early Childhood Council and Community Leaders to learn the core work of closing the preparation gap in Middletown.
- Conduct needs assessments in curriculum and SPED by transition team.
- Meet with district curriculum and instructional committees to discuss current state of education in Middletown Public Schools.
Explore Middletown

Entry Plan Activities

**Strategic Area IV: Community, Public Relations, Partnerships, and Communications**

Research contends that high performing districts have partnerships that are rooted on transparent communication lines. The listed activities in Strategic Area IV are designed to learn the district’s approach to family outreach, branding, community relations, partnerships, and strategic communications.

**Activities:**

- Meet with Mayor Drew and Common Council Leaders on a monthly/bi-monthly basis to discuss current and future state of Middletown Public Schools.
- Review current internal and external communication strategies.
- Review current communications plan.
- Analyze current use of social media as a communications strategy.
- Meet with Instructional Technology Team to review structure, process, procedures, and functionality of communications.
- Meet with city department leaders, elected town officials, Chief of Police, Fire Chief, and Common Council Members.
- Meet with community partners, faith-based groups, and business officials to discuss current state of partnerships and public relations with Middletown Public Schools.
- Meet with Wesleyan University and Middlesex Community College to discuss current partnerships with Middletown Public Schools.
- Meet with local and state business partners to discuss current partnerships with Middletown Public Schools.
- Evaluate the quality of the district website and schools’ website.
- Meet with State Department of Education and current educational partners to discuss current partnerships focused on academic and operational priorities.
Explore Middletown

Entry Plan Activities

Strategic Area V: Operations and Finance

Understanding the current strengths, opportunities, and strategies for improvement is a critical focus amongst our current fiscal challenges. It is essential that Middletown Public Schools use existing funding streams in a strategic manner that is responsible, while yielding the highest return of investment. As we strive for conditions to advance the student learning experience, activities in this area will assess the functionality of operations, working environments, human resources, and finance. The goal from this strategic area is to learn about the context of key areas as it pertains to operations in Middletown Public Schools.

Activities:

- Review all employee contracts.
- Learn and understand the district’s operations and finance infrastructure.
- Review facility needs for all schools.
- Meet with Public Works and Recreation Department.
- Conduct one-on-one meetings with business manager, director of human resources, and director of operations.
- Meet with finance, human resources, and operations team.
- Ensure budget guidelines and processes are in alignment with city charters.
- Assess how budgeting is aligned to support student achievement and strategic priorities.
- Meet with transportation providers to discuss on-going improvement strategies and existing contracts.
- Review key district financial reports, budgets, most recent audits, and grants.
- Conduct a needs assessment in the area of finance, human resources, and operations from transition team.
- Conduct one-on-one meetings with central office staff.
- Review district and school climate survey.
- Review the district’s safety, crisis, and communication plan.
**Explore Middletown**

**Review and Outcomes**

**Review**

During interim segments of implementation, the Board of Education, in conjunction with the Middletown community, will be provided with updates of the entry plan. Moreover, accountability measures (i.e., Organizational Checklist) will be utilized to ensure key activities are completed within the designated timeline. Key data metrics from *Explore Middletown* will be reviewed and disaggregated to serve as the frame for the strategic planning process.

**Outcomes**

At the conclusion of *Explore Middletown*, the following outcomes and next steps will be implemented to inform district level decisions and recommendations for systems improvement:

1. Summary report of feedback from stakeholders and community discussions during “listening, learning, and understanding” tour meetings.
2. Disseminate data findings from the organizational review in all designated strategic areas.
3. Disseminate efficiency findings from transition team.
4. Establish a Strategic Planning Committee that will help develop goals and strategies for Middletown Public Schools. The Strategic Plan would be presented to the Board of Education for final approval.