



Michael T. Conner, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools

“Investing in the Future.”

May 13, 2019

Dear Middletown Community,

On September 11, 2018, the Board of Education unanimously adopted *Middletown 2021: Keys to Innovation and Equity Strategic Operating Plan*. Each board member voted “yes” to work strategically and collaboratively on achieving the vision of improving our public schools. *Middletown 2021* is a blueprint for shifting our educational system toward *innovation* and *equity* and is an investment for our economic future. Many constituents in our community articulated the importance of public education at various events – conversations starkly focused on the current state of our schools, desired next steps for sustainable reform, and strategic investments to accomplish our student achievement goals. The diversity of perspectives and conversations were rich, insightful, and profound. There was one common theme after every invigorating discussion – will there be adequate funding to support our community’s vision of Middletown Public Schools?

The 2019 – 2020 operating budget approved by the Middletown Board of Education represents the voice of the community – strategically investing in our public school system for continuous improvement. In light of proposed bills currently under consideration by the state legislature, our practice of supporting staff salaries through the Alliance District Grant will have to radically change. Senate Bill 1018 states that 50% of the Alliance District Grant must be dedicated to literacy-based intervention/systems and/or chronic absenteeism. Moreover, due to the new state 25 credit graduation requirement (Senate Bill 1026), Middletown High School cannot sustain having an average of 216 students within a study hall period. Edward Ford Jr., Board of Education Member, shared his personal experience regarding study halls as a Middletown High School student. He stated, *“During my senior year at MHS in 2015, I had study halls that were unstructured, counterproductive and that took time from classroom instruction. The study halls were overcrowded and we weren’t doing much of anything productive. This idle time provided daily opportunities for brawls and excess drama between students to break out. Our students should be filtered out of these blocks of unstructured time during the school day and placed in classes that will gain them credits, knowledge and experience. We want our students to make the most out of their days at MHS, that won’t be done by having them continue to waste time in study halls instead of being in classes they want to take and need in order to graduate.”* This new state credit requirement requires the board of education to increase the number of teachers, school counselors, and academic courses at Middletown High School. This was reflected in the approved 2019 – 2020 Board of Education Operating Budget.

On a positive note, our enrollment trend supports receiving additional funding for first time in six years. The Board of Education introduced the strategy of *“strategic shifting”* to support these upcoming mandates and operational changes in February 2018 (BoE/Common Council Budget Workshop). Our strategy and approach was straightforward – shift 2% - 5% of salaries from the Alliance District Grant to the operating budget and increase high school options/courses to support our increasing enrollment. This strategy was reintroduced to the Common Council and community at our budget workshop in March 2019. In essence, our fundamental practice of allocating fiscal resources must underscore one core principle for students and families– utilizing tax dollars and state funding for a higher return on investment. Fiscal practices and appropriations must also shift to support this paradigm of innovation, equity, and continuous improvement. Community mindsets about education and strategic investments will experience a level of tension – this is normal within any community or organizational change management process. The investment in education is at a critical juncture for the city of Middletown – we are ready to accelerate *innovation* and *equity* on behalf of all students, parents, and stakeholders involved.

Middletown Public Schools is on a trajectory to achieve ambitious educational goals based on interim results. Our early end-of-year growth metrics highlight exponential achievement gains among all subgroups. This is a testament to our collaborative work as a community, strategic investments/decisions during the 2018 – 2019 academic year, and dedicated stakeholders focused on a shared organizational vision. I am confident that the public school ecosystem comprised of parents, constituents, stakeholders, advocates, and students believe that, with appropriate resources, Middletown Public Schools will *unlock the potential in ALL students*. Year-to-year budget requests will not be this significant in the future. In order to continue developing our education model, we must invest in our schools for community growth and economic health.

I have had the opportunity to discuss the state of education with many constituents during my 18 months as Superintendent of Schools. They view *Middletown 2021: Keys to Innovation and Equity Strategic Operating Plan* as an opportunity and challenge to prepare students for a competitive 21st century. Our community understands the urgency for adequate resources. Our public school system can and should be the economic lever for our growth as a community. The time is now to invest in our students and city. I urge you to support the 2019 – 2020 Middletown Board of Education operating budget request so we can continue our mission and vision of making Middletown Public Schools *the most progressive education enterprise in the state of Connecticut*.

Regards,

Michael T. Conner

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