



2019 – 2020

Superintendent's Interim Summary Report

**A Mid-Year Analysis of
Middletown 2021: Keys to Innovation and Equity
Strategic Operating Plan**

Presented to the Middletown Board of Education

Michael T. Conner, Ed.D.

Superintendent of Schools

January 3, 2020

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Dear Middletown Board of Education,

The *2019 – 2020 Superintendent’s Interim Report* provides the board of education and community with insights into our progress towards achieving the goals, strategies, and theory of action outlined in ***Middletown 2021: Keys to Innovation and Equity Strategic Operating Plan***.

Overall, the *Interim Report* demonstrates great strides towards attaining our 2019 - 2020 milestones. This progress would not have been possible without dedicated leadership at every level of the organization united by a singular vision – to provide *innovation and equity* for *ALL* students.

I look forward to continuing this work with you which underscores our core principles of learning, collaborative governance, and collective inquiry. Your civic leadership is truly appreciated by the entire Middletown Public Schools community. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me directly.

Regards,

Michael T. Conner

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Middletown 2021: Keys to Innovation and Equity Strategic Operating Plan

Goal I: Teaching and Learning

The overarching goal to improve classroom instruction has been underpinned by an intentional institutional shift to a culture steeped in growth and learning. One example of this shift is the adoption of the *“hybrid executive professional learning model”* to support the development of leaders and teachers in Middletown Public Schools (1.1). This shift features a job-embedded coaching support model where the Superintendent provides individual workshops for all instructional leaders differentiated by school and leadership teams. In order to successfully meet the academic needs of all students, leaders and teachers must be able to engage in meaningful professional learning activities that improve classroom instruction. Moreover, our goal is to create a common language of instruction and a common lexicon of leadership at Middletown Public Schools.

We are in year two of the development of our research-based literacy model in all elementary schools (MK5LI – 1.7). School-based leadership teams are engaged in professional learning workshops around the science of literacy. Moreover, all elementary schools are continuously deepening their implementation with our vertically-aligned K-5 intervention model. This structured system has yielded significant results in closing literacy gaps in core foundational areas, and has been closely monitored by Ms. Amy Mullen (K-5 Literacy Curriculum Supervisor). Monthly intervention walkthroughs occur using the *“facilitative coaching model”* to provide feedback to interventionists for continuous improvement. These practitioners also receive explicit content/coaching sessions around the science of literacy to strengthen the delivery of tiered support in every elementary school. A new feature in the 2019 – 2020 academic year is the vertical scaling of the *Bridge to Brilliance* initiative from Pre-K to kindergarten and grade one. This *“micro innovation”* where students are engaged in game-based literacy activities focused on expanding vocabulary through model read aloud activities (1.5) has strengthened our instructional model. We anticipate that the embedded interventions, coupled with integrating artificial intelligence, will continue our trajectory of closing the opportunity gap and advancing all students in a personalized manner.

With the leadership of Mr. Dwight Sharpe (District Facilitator of Equity, Social/Emotional Learning, and Restorative Practices) and Ms. Michelle Gohagon (Director of Professional Learning and Accountability),

Middletown Public Schools has started to deepen its work around equity. Mr. Sharpe continues to lead monthly meetings with district equity coaches, as well as meet with leaders and teachers to discuss strategies and conversation protocols targeted to address various elements of equity. And our equity coaches host monthly “circles” at their respective schools. Moreover, Ms. Gohagon and Mr. Sharpe have extended their work to create an inter-district collaboration with Region 13 (Durham/Middlefield) to leverage and scale this important work in Middlesex County. The District Equity Leadership Team (DELT) continues to participate in extended professional learning activities with SERC (State Education Resource Center) to refine the language in our racial equity policy, which we hope to present at a board of education policy meeting for an initial review later this year.

There have been significant advancements with our personalization strategy through the implementation of the Pathblazer software at all elementary schools (grades 2 – 5). During the 2018 – 2019 academic year, four elementary schools employed Pathblazer software in our instructional model with subsequent significant achievement gains demonstrated on the 2019 SBAC administration. At the outset of the 2019 – 2020 academic year, our central office leaders led by Ms. Julie Sheppard (K-5 Math Curriculum Supervisor) on-boarded the other four schools (Cohort II), which completes our horizontal strategy of scaling this initiative. All schools are receiving job-embedded coaching to integrate the software component into our instructional model. As highlighted in our strategic operating plan *monitoring system*, we have successfully integrated the structures of our personalized strategy in PreK – 8 (i.e. *Bridge to Brilliance* – PreK - 1, *Pathblazer* – grades 2 - 5, *UpSmart* – grades 6 – 8, and *Blended Intervention Supports* – grades 6 - 9).

Goal I: Short-term wins

- Continuation of equity work at all schools with district facilitator and site-based equity coaches (**Middletown 2021** core principle)
- Implementation of Design Thinking processes to leverage innovation to advance equity (**Middletown 2021** core principle)
- Completion of Cohort I and Cohort II elementary schools aligned to MK5LI model (1.7)
- Completion of Cohort I and Cohort II schools implementing Pathblazer software (1.2)
- Year II middle school interventions are “on-model” based on utilization metrics (1.4)
- Read 180 and Math 180 has been vertically-scaled to grade 9 at Middletown High School (1.4/1.6)
- Evidence of early success with eighth grade math model (1.8)
- UDL expansion has occurred with stronger collaboration and voice for **ALL** students (1.3)

- Adoption of *Early Minds 2022: Pathways to Readiness and Equity Strategic Operating Plan* (1.5)
- Completed application in partnership with ACES for Headstart slots in the 2020 – 2021 academic year (1.5)
- Received Fund for Greater Hartford grants for Early Childhood Programs (1.5)
- Community (school readiness, community providers, and MPS leaders/teachers) curriculum writing for early childhood adoption (1.5)
- Bridge to Brilliance implementation and expansion (1.5/1.7)
- Launch of new world language at Middletown High School (Italian – 1.6)
- Introduction and planning of Aerospace/Manufacturing Pathway for 2020 – 2021 academic year (1.6)
- Executive and embedded coaching for all administrators and teachers (1.1)

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Goal II: Operations, Systems, and Structures

The conceptual framework for MPS’s “*Four Office Operational Structure*” was introduced to and approved by the board of education during the 2018 – 2019 academic year. I am pleased to report that the structural framework including position redesign (i.e. job description creation) has been successfully completed. As of the 2019 – 2020 academic year, MPS Operational Structure is as follows:

- ***Office of Teaching and Learning*** (Dr. Magda Parvey, Chief Academic Officer)
- ***Office of Finance and Administration*** (Ms. Christine Bourne, Chief of Administration)
- ***Office of Operations and Communication*** (Mr. Marco Gaylord, Chief of Operations and Communication)
- ***Office of Talent and Performance Management*** (TBD, Chief of Talent and Performance Management)

Each department within Middletown Public Schools reports to a designated office and Chief. This structure has improved efficiencies – specifically recommendations for accelerated communications and more efficient workflow based on the NESC report. With the election of our new Mayor, I believe we will be able to further improve operational efficiencies through the redesign of the Human Resources (Talent Office transformation – 2.1) and Business Office (Finance Office transformation – 2.6) models.

We have officially adopted the *MPS Food Service Plan* (2.10) and received approval for the *MPS Five-Year Facilities Program* from both the facilities and finance committees (2.9). *The MPS Future Ready*

Technology Plan (2.5) will be presented at upcoming curriculum and finance committee meetings; albeit in its first draft which includes recommendations from the technology audit that was conducted in Summer 2019.

Goal II: Short-term wins

- Implementation of new operational office structure (Goal 2 – review/completion of new job descriptions and reclassification of department staff)
- Completion of redesigned executive positions of Chief Academic Officer, Chief of Administration, and Chief of Operations and Communication (Goal 2)
- Implementation of five-year forecasting model for 2020/2021 budgeting process (2.6)
- Completion of *MPS Five-Year Facilities Program* (2.9)
- Adoption of *MPS Foods Service Plan* (2.10)
- Completion of *MPS Future Ready Technology Plan* with audit recommendations (2.5)
- Implemented components of equity-based budgeting for the 2019 – 2020 academic year (2.7)
- Blueprint and redesign schematics of Talent Office and Finance Office completed (2.1)

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Goal III: Choice and Innovation Models

Innovation using *Design Thinking* methods has been a key driver during the implementation of ***Middletown 2021***. In Summer 2019, Middletown Public Schools launched the *MPS Summer Literacy Academy* where over 200 students participated in the literacy-based acceleration program (3.1). We are currently in the initial planning stages of expanding our literacy academy with the vertical scale of grade 4 in summer 2020. Our strategic partnership in summer 2019 with the Middletown Parks and Recreation department provided a comprehensive summer learning and enrichment experience that was beneficial for our families and students. Also, all MPS elementary schools and MHS have employed *Makerspaces* to expand the cultivation of the “*essential skills*” (creativity, problem-solving, collaboration, cognitive flexibility, and emotional intelligence); student competencies that are not evident in traditional curriculum frameworks (Goal 3). Based on community feedback, this has been an extraordinary implementation where students are exploring real-world problems that are predictable and taking risks and realizing positive and negative results. Further, this initiative has evoked new teaching approaches for creative problem-solving activities (3.7).

Our innovation models at Macdonough (3.2), Lawrence (3.4), and Moody/Snow (3.5) are proceeding according to their design plans based on key milestones/implementation steps in the strategic operating plan. Our internal offices will be meeting with instructional leaders and program coaches at

Macdonough and Lawrence to continue the process of completing both specialized program projects at Macdonough (STEM Academy) and Lawrence (International Baccalaureate distinction) starting in January. Quad D Learning Laboratories at Moody and Snow are making steady progress toward implementation with direct support from the International Center for Leadership in Education. This is a four-stage/phase-in process, of which we are in year two of the design. I infer that the full model will be developed by the beginning of Fall 2022. Once this model is completed, teachers from across the district will be able to visit classrooms at each school and apply their learning to their own classroom instruction from a lateral context (i.e. peer-to-peer model). Thus, meeting our goal of achieving a common language of instruction by the close of **Middletown 2021**.

The consolidation of Keigwin and Woodrow Wilson schools is on-track from a brick-and-mortar context. With regards to the academic and operational design of the new “*innovation hub*”, both Keigwin and Woodrow Wilson are working in design teams using principles of *Design Thinking* to institute the new learning hub for students (3.6). Based on pilots/experiments from the 2018 – 2019 academic year (*design thinking principle #4 – prototyping for systems design*), we have scaled our implementation of UpSmart in 6-8 Math/ELA classes (1.2) and redesigned our eighth grade math model so accelerated models are available to **ALL** students (1.8). Our bi-monthly meetings with community members, leaders, teachers, staff, and strategic partners (*Innovation 2021: Middle Grades Design, Integration, and Improvement* committee) have generated great recommendations and feedback (*design thinking principle #5 – getting feedback for modifications*) to inform decisions/next-steps with each school-based design team.

Goal III: Short-term wins

- Implementation of STEM model components in kindergarten and grade 4 at Macdonough (3.3)
- Second phase of IB design at Lawrence (3.4)
- Strategic realignment of Quad D Learning Laboratories at Moody and Snow (3.5)
- Design teams at Keigwin and Woodrow Wilson to support consolidation (3.6/3.7)
- *Innovation 2021: Middle Grades Design, Improvement and Integration* bi-monthly committee meetings (3.6/3.7)
- Middle school innovation/equity structures and systems (1.2/1.4/3.6)
- Planning of next stages of systems alignment for 2020 – 2021 academic year (3.6)
- Planning of grade 4 expansion for MPS Summer Literacy Academy (3.1)

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Goal IV: Collaborative Learning Environments

Middletown Public Schools continues to focus on strengthening school/family partnerships, as well as looking for new approaches to include **ALL** voices. Mrs. Donna Marino (District Partnership Coordinator) and I are examining new venues for our community conversations – outreach is the strategy to connect with more families (4.1). Currently, we have made adjustments with the design of our community conversations based on feedback from the 2018 – 2019 academic year. An example is a segment of our community conversation will focus on “*key topics*” that are of interest to the community (e.g. college readiness, racial equity, social/emotional learning, achievement gap, health, etc.). We will be hosting the second annual “*State of Education*” in May, as a culminating activity for our community to conclude the 2019 – 2020 academic year. The Department of Family Engagement (***Office of School Operations***) received a state grant to continue our Parent Leadership Institute, which plays a vital role in building civic capacity and advocacy skills to ensure voices are heard within the public school system.

The Department of Pupil Services and Special Education (***Office of Teaching and Learning***) continues to be the model in the State of Connecticut with regards to Social Emotional Learning (SEL). With the support of the federally-funded Project Aware grant (in collaboration with the Connecticut State Department of Education and the Naugatuck and New Britain school districts), we have expanded the *Middletown Social Emotional Learning Initiative (MSELI)* to four elementary schools, with additional implementation at Keigwin and Woodrow Wilson middle schools and Middletown High School (3.3). We plan to continue our vertical scale strategy in the 2020 – 2021 academic year. We have also expanded our efforts to scale social emotional learning initiatives to our early childhood programs (1.5). Community workshops to support and align SEL strategies at home have been provided through a collaboration between the Department of Family Engagement (***Office of School Operations***) and Department of Pupil Services and Special Education (***Office of Teaching and Learning***). Overall, this work coupled with cross-functional department collaboration (i.e. Department of Health Services and Nurses – 4.4) has created a parallel focus on academics, SEL, and the development of the whole-child.

Goal IV: Short-term wins

- Community Conversations and new structure based on community feedback (4.1)
- Implementation of “CHIL” initiative at all elementary schools including district meetings and city departments (4.4)
- Continued collaboration with MSAA on policy language of School Leadership Councils (4.5)
- School safety/security grant for technology enhancements (4.6)

- Strengthen interdependent collaboration with city, fire, police, and other entities for a centralized security model (4.6)
- Weekly wellness tips and strategies for staff of Middletown Public Schools (4.4)
- New partnership with Mayor Florsheim to develop joint community meetings (4.1)