Explore Middletown **Final Report**

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MIDDLETOWN
Public Schools

Listening, Learning, and Understanding

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Introduction

The framework, structure, and impetus of *Explore Middletown* are tools to assess our current organizational systems using quantitative (e.g. formative and summative metrics) and qualitative (e.g. interviews and informal/formal meetings) information in the five strategic areas of our learning enterprise. Each strategic area elicits critical themes based on internal/external perspectives of our primary stakeholders: Middletown Public Schools' administrators and teachers, city government officials, local colleges/universities, community partners/advocates, Board of Education members, parents and students. The strategic areas of *Explore Middletown* include:

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**

The data collected from the Entry Plan will assist in the construction of **Middletown 2021: Keys to Innovation and Equity.**

Goals

Explore Middletown's strategic composition focused on achieving five goals that were aligned to empirical research on effective management transitions including:

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. **Examine data to inform a strategic planning process**
5. **Design strategic planning process and execution**

Structure and Activities of *Explore Middletown*

Since November 6, 2017, a three-tiered process was implemented with stakeholders using an intentional design for activities structured for reflection, organizational learning, and collective inquiry. *Explore Middletown* generated 1,358 participants engaging in a variety of educational forums where cross-functional/cohort-oriented discussions provided context for the strategic vision of Middletown Public Schools. Demographics from *Explore Middletown* include:

1. 1, 358 participants (November 6, 2017 - March 13, 2018)
2. 11 school visits that included meetings with school-based leaders, practitioners, students and staff
3. 35 classroom observations focused on rigor and relevance (quick scan)
4. Transition team needs assessment in the content-area of literacy (Hill for Literacy)
5. Transition team needs assessment in the area of operations and finance (National Executive Services Corp.)
6. Transition team needs assessment with 6-12 academic alignment and rigor (Center for Secondary School Redesign)
7. Transition team needs assessment on current middle school practices (Hanover Research)
8. Transition team needs assessment on current internal model and structure using data metrics (Dr. David Bain)
9. Transition team needs assessment on current budgeting streams and human resource practices (Dr. Regis Shields, Education Solutions)
10. One-to-one interviews with all Central Office department leaders
11. On-to-one interviews with all Central Office departments
12. One-to-one interviews with all school principals
13. Meetings with the Executive Boards of MSAA, MFT, 466, UPSEU and Para Educators unions
14. Monthly meetings with Mayor Drew
15. Meetings with community partners, advocacy groups, local universities/colleges, and city government officials
16. Technology and Operations needs assessment
17. Review of current safety, crisis, and communication plan
18. Review of district performance data, perception data, and demographic data
19. Community Conversations with all constituents and stakeholders (14 completed with over 500 participants)

Explore Middletown intentionally welcomed all stakeholders to ensure that diverse opinions and experiences were fully represented in its findings.

The dual structure of inquiry and learning, in the context of activities within each strategic area, led to an evolutionary process of organizational themes for leverage and continuous improvement processes. This will frame our work to improve classroom instruction, student achievement, and ensure that the voices of all Middletown families are engaged as change agents.

Quantitative Data Analysis: Performance, Perception, and Demographic Metrics

The final disaggregated statistical report of *Explore Middletown* utilized research methodologies to unwrap Middletown Public Schools from both performance and perception lenses. Data metrics were exclusively analyzed from the context of organizational learning and an orientation to the macro-cultural themes of student performance and engagement. Each component of the data metrics will be contextualized into goals and strategies for *Middletown 2021: Keys to Innovation and Equity*. District performance measures and designated key indicators will be constructed and coiled into Middletown's Strategic Plan for continuous improvement efforts.

Performance and Climate

Closing the achievement and engagement gaps within the learning organization will be a critical focus in *Middletown 2021: Keys to Innovation and Equity.* An orientation of our overall performance was achieved by conducting a high level statistical analysis utilizing five different measures (e.g. district climate survey, development assets metrics, SBAC, Next Generation Accountability Index, and district formative data). Throughout the analysis of various psycho-measures, the data revealed a constant theme—an achievement/engagement gap that is persistent within specific, defined subgroups (e.g. high needs subgroup, free/reduced, SPED, ELL, and race). Moreover, our students that are performing above the national normative score on both standardized and benchmark assessments are demonstrating trend stagnation based on three-years of data. The statistical metrics underscore these principles—49% of students that were assessed on the 2017 SBAC assessment met or exceed standards on the ELA segment. Alarmingly, 41% performed below benchmark on the SBAC, which demonstrated a regression in achievement from 2016 to 2017. Data also contends that elementary-to-middle school transition has a direct impact on student achievement. Two-year cohort trends exhibit an 8% ELA regression for students transitioning from grade 5 to grade 6 and a 9% proficiency regression from grade 6 to grade 7. Vertical trends also contend a 3% gap performance between grades 3-5 and 6-8.

Sense of Urgency

Math will be a primary focus of the 2018-2021 Strategic Plan. An internal gap analysis suggests that 37% of students in grades 3-8 met proficiency standards on the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) with 63% not meeting proficiency standards. Parenthetically, 71% of students in grades 6-8 (2017 administration) did not achieve the necessary scale score to reach the proficiency benchmark on the SBAC. Overall, based on the 2016-17 Next Generation Accountability report (holistic overview of district performance in 12 indicators), our performance exceeded the state deviation for a "gap outlier" in ELA (indicator one/indicator two) and Math (indicator one/indicator two) by 2.8% and 1.1% respectively. This means that our achievement gap in ELA and Math are higher than the state average based on the Next Generation Accountability reporting system. Since our overall accountability performance has displayed a persistent stagnation or regression with indicator one/indicator two (Next Generation Accountability Report). The external gap in comparison with our state counterparts increased by 1.2% based on the Next Generation Accountability Report.

Data Anomalies and Outliers

Middletown Public Schools' absolute performance in the context of proficiency bands and subgroups suggest domestic outliers against national normative trends. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the internal/external achievement gap implies that poverty is the profound lever for underperformance. Conversely, Middletown's pretext for the achievement gap is race. This data principle highlights that the Black/White achievement gap is 35% and Hispanic/White achievement gap is 34% in the content area of ELA. The "economically disadvantaged" subgroup exhibited a 17% performance gap in ELA based on the 2017 SBAC administration. The Asian subgroup demonstrated the highest level of achievement in ELA with 70% meeting standards on the SBAC, while 100% of SPED and ELL students did not meet proficiency on SBAC. Based on a

high-level aggregated data analysis, 50% (816 students in grades 3-8) of students that scored below proficient within all defined subgroups would qualify for a tiered structural support (e.g. tier II/tier III).

Numeracy, in the context of absolute performance and growth, demonstrated outcome trends that are similar to ELA. Our SPED and ELL population did not meet proficiency standards based on the SBAC. There was a modest increase with "all students" based on the Next Generation Accountability Index. Because the state demonstrated a regression achievement from 2015-16 to 2016-17, the external achievement gap closed by 2.9%. There continues to be a perpetual subgroup gap between Black/White and Hispanic/White subgroups. 410 students (86%) in the black subgroups either scored "not meeting" or "approaching" on the 2017 administration of the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (grades 3-8). Moreover, in the Hispanic subgroup, 370 students (82%) scored "approaching" or "not meeting" on the 2017 SBAC. This represents a 39% and 35% internal gap respectively. Consequently, based on the 2017 SBAC administration, 60% would qualify for a level two or level three structural support.

Climate, Engagement, Relationships, and Alignment

High performing districts and their organizational psychologies are rooted in a positive culture that invites relationships, rigor, and adult/student relevancy. The 2017 school climate data suggests 78% of students in grades 3-5 have a positive relationship with their teacher. Though this is above the national normative score, we have to recognize that 22% of students in grades 3-5 do not feel they have a positive relationship with their teacher. Our students in this vertical cohort also feel a sense of belonging in their learning environment (78%) and value school (80%) as an entity. 72% of classroom practitioners believe that the student/teacher relationship is critical. This is an indication that there is a positive culture in our learning environment. Further, engagement metrics contend that 56% of students believe they are active participants within the educational process. Engagement, specifically for Middletown Public Schools, is defined as, 'relevant experiences for academic progress'. Participants in our "Community Conversations" suggested that 'relevant experiences' should entail: choice, agency, inquiry and teacher facilitation. Collectively, there are data lines that suggest safety in schools, in particular, its connection to social/emotional learning, must be addressed through the design of parallel district strategies for the expansion of academic supports and integrated systems for personal development and behavior management.

Grades 3-5 and 6-12 Climate Data Outliers

Three key metrics generated "outliers" when conducting a vertical comparison with student perceptions in grades 3-5 and 6-12. A statistical outlier in the context of the "student experience" exhibits a 33% discrepancy between "teacher/student relationships" in grades 3-5 (78%) and 6-12 (45%). Alarmingly, only 23% of students at the secondary level (6-12) believe they are "engaged" at their school. The stark, yet compelling contrast with students' experiences will be a priority for our district. Each metric demonstrates a consistent need—building sustainable relationships and organizational designs that are student-focused. Student-driven learning by definition embeds concepts of inquiry, personal/academic agency, and creating internal/external networks of voice. These are the levers of accelerating authentic achievement for students. The climate metrics promulgate an important narrative as well—our organization tenets must be flexible and relevant with patterns that create conditions for deep learning and active participation.

Priority Focus from Statistical, Performance, and Perception Disaggregation:

- Closing the achievement gap with innovative/standardized organizational designs
- Developing instructional structures and systems that invite students as the coordinators of their learning
- Consistent tiered intervention/structural support implementation
- Decrease chronic absenteeism rates
- Increase arts access for students (based on Next Generation Accountability Index)
- Integrating culturally responsive practices
- Create organizational systems that underscore student agency, efficacy, and voice
- Decrease number of students qualifying for tiered intervention support
- Improve the overall quality of tier I instructional delivery
- Utilizing curriculum and instruction as the "lever" for systems improvement
- Improve assessment literacy to align with effective practices

Strategic Area Analysis

During the 120-day implementation of *Explore Middletown*, a variety of stakeholder groups participated in one-to-one interviews, department meetings, school leadership team meetings, city government meetings, and fourteen community conversations with individuals that represent Middletown. Each subset engaged in structured and differentiated questions around the five strategic areas of the learning organization. In totality, emergent themes, patterns, and data points from each meeting were represented in the final report for next steps in the development and implementation of our strategic plan.

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

The Board of Education is the most important entity in the context of setting the vision, establishing goals, prioritizing outcomes, superintendent execution, and reforming policies that will improve overall achievement. During informal/formal discussions about the district, all board members have exhibited a strong commitment to improve academic achievement. Our Board of Education will be the catalyst to drive our continuous improvement narrative to: close the achievement gap, create learning platforms for all students, deepen innovation, and establish policies that will support the implementation of the strategic plan. Each member is committed to meeting the needs of the broader community, while advocating for resources that will support all students. It is clear we are lucky to have a nine-member elected body that has a common goal and is devoid of any hidden political frames—the focus is on advancing our governance structure to deepen our coalition work around the instructional core (i.e. teacher, student, and content).

Defining Governance in Middletown

Governance in the contextual manner is difficult to define—especially with four newly elected officials to the Board. Defining our governance model will engage elected members in professional learning activities outlining how "the Board will govern" and "the superintendent will manage". Specifically, for the Middletown Board of Education, governance is "steering" and management is "rowing". This is underscored with responsibilities of establishing common beliefs, adopting a compelling/convincing theory of action, and overseeing the management of our organizational systems. Through retreat exercises in partnership with the superintendent, all board members will continue to align mental models and build capacity (civic and external) around reform initiatives and continue to iterate the core beliefs, commitments, and action steps to the broader community.

Committee Structure and Policy Alignment to *Middletown 2021: Keys to Innovation and Equity*

Currently, the structure of our Board of Education includes both full board meetings and ad-hoc sub-committees. Each committee meets on a monthly basis; however, the goal is to systematically align our governance model with the strategic plan priorities and the core work of each committee. During the Board of Education Retreat in February 2018, members discussed the potential value of the consolidation of some committees with an eye toward: efficiencies of time, alignment with district goals, and structured civic responsibilities focused on the instructional core.

Workshop and Business Meeting Structure

The work of underpinning effective practices within our defined governance model requires a meta-level understanding of strategies that will ensure all children are on grade level (academic literacy), students have potential for success (civic and occupational literacy), and eliminate all gaps despite student demography, within Middletown Public Schools (equity, improvement, and innovation). The learning and knowledge required to support all goals within our strategic plan are extensive, which may be the impetus of restructuring the current configuration of board meetings. At present, board of education meetings are held monthly with an average time of three hours; with the "Superintendent's Report" segment lasting between 75-90 minutes. With the implementation of the Strategic Plan in September and continuous efforts to refine our governance structure, standard business meetings could last between 3-4 hours. As we begin efforts to build civic and internal capacity around defined organizational priorities, a recommendation is to have a two-meeting structure: a monthly workshop focused solely on building capacity around core initiatives; in addition to the monthly business meeting that focuses on standard operating procedures.

Priority Focus for Strategic Area I:

- Annual Board of Education retreats to define district governance model
- Consolidation of Board of Education committees to deepen governance model and strategic plan alignment
- Explore workshop and business meeting model to focus work on strategic priorities and district operating functions
- Aligning board of education and superintendent mental model/mindset targeted to vision, mission, theory of action, and organizational systems of the district

Strategic Area II: Organizational Leadership, Capacity, and Alignment

The pillar for improving conditions to enhance teaching and learning is ensuring organizational systems are aligned to goals, priorities, and strategic correlates. While operational structures are evident, organizational efficacy is being stymied by silos, which implicitly inhibit alignment, coherence, and exponential production. Thus, all integrated departments must operationalize as an interface to advance teaching and learning. These pernicious symptoms undermine innovation for cross-teaming at all levels, limit productivity for efficacy, stifle flexibility to strengthen strategic priorities, and handcuff capacity to develop a common language of instruction.

Structured Accountability/Autonomy Exchange: Advancing Innovation

Moving from a state of "actual practice" to "effective practice" will be multi-directional in the context of supporting the implementation of the improvement strategy. Adopting a strategic plan recognizes that each individual school has unique characteristics that must be supported beyond the "structured" guidance of central office. Limiting restricted guidelines of time, resources, and stakeholder capacity will invite creative thinking to advance improvement strategies within the district. Employing a balance between centralized and decentralized approaches (hybrid model) will ensure there is a high level of accountability, while targeting expectations for performance. Various stakeholder groups recognize the value of a hybrid model that they believe will strengthen our organizational elements in totality. Building a systems strategy focused on accountability, performance management, and structured autonomy will be the leverage point to improve quality in this strategic area.

Priority Focus for Strategic Area II:

- Aligning operating systems to increase student achievement
- Eliminating silos that exist within our learning organization
- Building cross-functional capital at all levels within the learning organization
- Building instructional capacity at the site-level for structured autonomy (e.g. School Governance Councils)
- Ensuring a level of performance management and accountability with education/non-education stakeholders in Middletown Public Schools

Strategic Area III: Teaching, Learning, and Student Achievement

The core function and lever for our continuous improvement efforts in Middletown Public Schools will be instruction and outcomes. In context, our broader community highlighted that our actual practices (specifically targeted to teaching and learning) must be underscored with a 21st century equity lens. Our collective definition based on "Community Conversation" themes with the vision of a 21st century learner includes:

- Civic engagement and occupational skill development
- Digital citizenship with a balance of technological and work-readiness skill development
- Collaborative task activities that embed problem-solving with unpredictable outcomes
- Global learning experiences through multi-disciplinary approaches
- Socratic classrooms that are underpinned with inquiry-based pedagogy

With efforts to intentionally shift the instructional paradigm to address the three literacy functions of education (i.e. academic, civic, and occupational), there must be a parallel expansion of equity. Throughout *Explore Middletown*, stakeholders of our educational community defined equity in education as:

- Equal access to resources (equity is not equality)
- Culturally responsive practices/theories integrated into all curriculum frameworks
- Equity mindset and mental models
- High expectations despite race, achievement level, or economic background
- Deeper alignment with community partners and local agencies for strategic coordination with the Middletown Public Schools
- Dismantling existing organizational structures that inhibit equity principles and practices

The Middletown Public Schools started their internal equity endeavor four years ago. Our community has articulated that this work must move into the "design phase", which means a holistic transformation of the organizational systems to reflect the "community conversation" on equity.

Leaders, Teachers, Certified/Classified Staff, and Community Partners

At the outset of every discussion within *Explore Middletown*, there was a general consensus that our strength as a school community is the dedicated individuals that make the Middletown Public Schools a success. Every day, leaders, practitioners, and support staff ensure all students are provided with a high quality learning experience. Collectively, there is a mindset within Middletown Public Schools for shared growth and development to continue the positive trajectory of preparing our students for the 21st century. Also, there was a general consensus that Middletown Public Schools' effort to grow stakeholder engagement can be achieved through a compelling vision that will inform our improvement strategy (i.e. Strategic Plan).

Time as a Resource

According to the National Center for Time and Learning, a leverage strategy to improve student-learning outcomes, is utilizing and framing the quality of time. During the 2017-18 academic year our current assessment practices have practitioners away from core instruction on an average of 30-50 hours at the elementary level. Moreover, a practitioner who participates in district-level activities can miss up to 5-8 days of instruction per academic year. This does not include our modified day schedule each month, which eliminates up to six hours of instruction per month. The focus, moving forward, will be strategically increasing time through new assessment and district-level practices to align with national research regarding time as a "leverage lever" resource to generate higher student learning outcomes.

Strengthening and Deepening Early Childhood Education

Many national and local educational networks identify the achievement gap as the problem of context. If one was to 'unwrap' the elements of the achievement gap, they would discover that its root-cause is the preparation/opportunity gap from birth-to-four. The achievement gap is caused by not addressing pernicious symptoms at the early onset. The efforts to close the demography gap (e.g. preparation, opportunity, and belief) require strategic alignment with the early childhood community, advocates, and MPS. Efforts will require a shift in practice to strengthen Pre-K/K alignment and deepen coherence in a meaningful manner. The vision for the work is to ensure that resources and community efforts focus on every student transitioning into MPS is **"ready for kindergarten"** without any pre-existing gaps.

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

Explore Middletown required participants to think deeply about growth areas. A consensus among our stakeholders is the need to sustain and build SEL systems that are restorative—not punitive. Throughout the district, there are a variety of different processes (e.g. PBIS, Restorative Justice) that have varying results. Creating a standard platform with embedded lateral supports will ensure social/emotional health is a priority—especially in the elementary vertical cohort (K-5). Creating internal systems grounded on social/emotional constructs will be adaptive, albeit necessary, in developing the whole child.

Innovation by Design

Our current organization systems are underpinned with semi-industrial practices that perpetuate the achievement gap. Innovation, as defined by *Explore Middletown* participants, is exercising collaboration to advance creative ideas around a goal or strategy. Organizational entrepreneurship invites creativity, risk, and coherence, and must become part of our culture. Participants suggested that innovation is welcomed at all levels, but it must be implemented in stages for success and sustainability.

Priority Focus for Strategic Area III:

- Continue building on strengths with regards to our school community
- Strengthen tiered intervention model (K-8) that is targeted and prescriptive
- Improve Tier I instruction through vertical coaching at all levels
- Improve the overall learning and climate conditions at grades 6-12
- Ensure equity and innovation are organizational focuses and priorities
- Align SEL systems with a focus on improving current processes of support
- Focus on Early Childhood Education to end the demography and preparation gaps
- Develop student-driven environments where relationships, choice, participation, and rigor are designed for inquiry/innovation
- Increase instructional time, while minimizing teacher-pullouts
- Create personalized pathways and career academies that address college and career readiness
- Eliminate current practices with high school study halls to promote more academic and intellectual rigor to include the expansion of AP enrollment and other programming (e.g. World Languages, Humanities, and Medical)

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

Within each community conversation or school-based meeting, there was a consensus that as a district MPS needs to improve communications. Leaders, teachers, parents, and students highlighted that there are many great programs and events that occur within the Middletown Public Schools but we are not in the practice of sharing the good news with our stakeholders. The community would like to see consistent, multi-faceted communication streams (e.g. social media, website, monthly newsletters). This does not include standard/procedural calls, but updates that will detail the positive trajectory of Middletown Public Schools as our strategic plan unfolds. Our community supports public education, but there has to be a focus on how to articulate this information to highlight our success as a district.

Strengthening External Partnerships for Innovative Programs

Middletown Public Schools has opportunities to deepen its organizational priorities with outside partners. Various business partners believe that our partnerships, especially with local colleges/universities are superficial. These partnerships will be revisited and strengthened through creativity and innovation.

Perception of Middletown Public Schools

A collective strength within our school community based on participants in *Explore Middletown* are the teachers, leaders, professional staff, parents, and students that frame the composition of Middletown Public Schools. Our award winning vocational-agriculture program at Middletown High School, nationally recognized DECA program at MHS, and two "Schools of Distinction" identified by the State Department of Education (Moody School and Lawrence School) are just a few highlights that were noted by participants. Yet, various metrics within *Explore Middletown* suggest that community constituents have an unfounded, negative perception of Middletown Public Schools. Our community wants the perception changed to ***the most progressive education organization in Connecticut***. Stakeholders believe that all city officials, elected officials, and community members should strive as 'one Middletown' to make this vision a reality.

Visibility in Schools

Over 98% of participants believe their superintendent should be visible in the community, engage in classroom instruction, and set the vision of the learning organization. Visibility, as articulated by the participants, was defined as being the strategic thinker to advance academic initiatives for all students. Also, education stakeholders contended that the Superintendent should provide updates on goals and priorities of the Strategic Plan. Students who participated in *Explore Middletown* (7% of the total population) believe they should "know the Superintendent" and that he should "engage with students" on a daily basis. Our students highlighted that they want to engage in deep dialogue around current trends about their school community. A deeper platform for engagement, equity, and ideas will advance the student experience based on the feedback from education stakeholders and students.

Improved Relations with City Officials

The Board of Education and City Officials from Middletown are in consensus that all entities support education and improve conditions for student learning. As we continue to redefine this partnership between the Board of Education and City Officials to advance the overarching goals of raising achievement and improving relationships; aligning mental models will be the lever to ensure students are the priority. A data trend within *Explore Middletown* suggested mistrust due to budget quarrels in previous years over resource appropriation/allocation. Moreover, misnomers and rumors eroded relationships externally and internally. Improving collaboration, understanding student achievement goals, and reengineering trust through transparency will ensure all entities (e.g. City Officials,

Board of Education, Common Council, and Education Stakeholders) are successful in making MPS the most progressive educational institution in Connecticut.

Priority Focus for Strategic Area IV:

- Strengthening City, Common Council, Board of Education relationships
- Transparency and Trust
- Establishing relationships with community partners—including colleges/universities
- Ensuring all families and parents are represented with a voice in the community
- Create internal/external communications structure and plan

Strategic Area V: Operations and Finance

Strategic improvements specifically in the areas of operations and finance are important mechanisms that will influence classroom instruction. Various interview segments of *Explore Middletown* coupled with an internal assessment conducted by National Executive Services Corp. (NESC) contends that organizational efficiencies must improve for alignment and coherence. The underscoring data themes suggest a need for cross-functionality, greater access to equity, and shared accountability (education/non-education functions) for all departments in Middletown Public Schools.

Process Improvements to Advance Internal Operational Systems

The National Executive Service Corp. (NESC) conducted a high level needs assessment of all operational functions in Middletown Public Schools. Overall findings suggest opportunities for growth with processes in our systems (e.g. central service to schools, budget modeling, and efficiencies within building maintenance). It was noted that schools are currently expending time to implement "exception processes" which are actions not focused on closing the achievement gap or improving classroom instruction. Moreover, departments and schools identified discrepancies between "actual" versus "known" district funds—thus, the impetus of "mass spending" in the months of April and May for two consecutive years. Addressing management systems with a direct focus on "efficiencies" will have a two-folded impact at the district and school-based level. Focusing on work order management, central services to schools and having a shared understanding of the impact of management systems on student achievement will pivot the focus to instructional growth and development in a coherent context.

Schools as Customers

Aggregated improvement is a continuous cycle where schools enhance their understanding of what they can control—time, money, programming, and staff. An internal education analysis suggests that our operating structure employs a strategy that is tightly coupled. This standard operating element implicitly inhibits "experimental democracy"—opportunities for differentiated and innovative services for continuous improvement. When there is an articulated balance of centralized/decentralized policies, school communities take part in collective problem solving by design. The notion of having "schools as customers" restructures the roles/responsibilities of central administration. This includes creating functions, knowledge and infrastructure for support. Moreover, the role of central administration will be multi-adaptive where cross-functionality will be needed for sustainability.

Shifting Human Resources to Talent Management

The Human Resources Department of Middletown Public Schools operates under a traditional model for business operations. Current functions in the context of human resources must be designed to advance the organization's human capital and instructional core strategy. A "Talent Management Office" supports various levels of improvement and accountability in accordance to a broader strategic plan. Managing human capital will consist of hiring, supporting, and developing stakeholders to support the district's improvement strategy. This type of structure and management design requires an HRIS (Human Resources Information System) adoption for data mining purposes. Redesigning a system of this magnitude will require extensive internal research with segmented phases of implementation.

Equity-Based Budgeting and Strategic Alignment (ESSA Guidelines)

Every Student Success Act (ESSA) has facilitated fiscal flexibility focused on innovation at state and local agencies. Flexibility in this context ensures evidence of student growth and higher levels of systems efficacy with an equity lens. Our current school appropriation mechanism operates on a funding structure for equality. Implicitly, this creates an insidious culture of inequity. The 2018-19 Board of Education adopted budget is student-focused and empowers schools to make effective use of resources in support of the strategic priorities of the district. Moving from a traditional system of finance to a student-driven system of finance will be a macro-level shift in function. Building a financial system underscored by transparency, flexibility, and equity will enhance our efforts to reach strategic goals for Middletown students.

School Safety

A consistent data trend within *Explore Middletown* was school safety and security in all schools. Parents, stakeholders, and students expressed concerns about educators being armed on school campuses. Middletown Public Schools is steadfast in its stance—under state statute weapons or firearms are prohibited on school grounds. Middletown Public Schools conducted an analysis of its current safety/security protocols with law/safety experts (Middletown Police Department and Middletown Fire Department) for improvement purposes. Each month, safety measures are assessed for deeper alignment and coordination with internal/external systems. The safety of our students and stakeholders is a priority for the City of Middletown and will always be a constant for our district.

Priority Focus for Strategic Area V:

- Improve low-yield efficiencies in operations and facilities for high-impact
- Restructure budgeting process to be student-focused, flexible, and equitable
- Structure functions of human resources, business management, facilities, and operations to support the growth of schools for classroom instruction/student achievement
- Continuous improvement and refinement of district safety plan with collaboration of public safety experts (e.g. Middletown Police Department and Middletown Fire Department)
- Central office shifting to be customer-oriented for development and growth of schools