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Press Release FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Middletown Schools Open And Ready for Full-Day Kindergarten



Three Middletown Township kindergarteners prepare to board the bus for their first day of school. They represent the first class ever to have full-day kindergarten. The school district was able to outfit 23 new classrooms for the students over the summer. All students were able to go to their home school among Middletown's 12 elementary buildings at no additional cost to taxpayers.--a major accomplishment.

Middletown: The smiles were bright and the atmosphere festive on a glorious day as the youngest students in the Middletown School District prepared for their first day of elementary school. Moms and Dads and proud grandparents were snapping pictures as they entered their schools or boarded their buses. Parental video cameras captured the bus's departure carrying their most precious possessions down the road and out of sight. This year's group of kindergartners holds a special distinction in the history of the Township for they are the first to experience a full-day kindergarten program. This was accomplished within the current budget and without any additional cost to Middletown's taxpayers.

Superintendent Karen Bilbao remarks, "This September marks a pivotal moment for our school district as we offer full-day kindergarten to all our age eligible students in our twelve elementary schools. While our teaching staff did a very good job teaching the curriculum with only 2 and ½ hours of kindergarten per day, their time was often rushed to get through the curriculum. The extra time will benefit all and make for a much more relaxed and productive environment for our youngest students. When they enter first grade next year, the students will be able to benefit from the increased instructional time."

Meg Connelly, Middletown parent of a first grader and new kindergartner was delighted that her second child (and his two younger siblings) will benefit from this program.

She comments, "I am so excited that my son will be given the gift of time during the day in kindergarten. Although, I honestly believe the teachers did a great job with the 2 and ½ hour time constraint, I think the teachers will now be able to give the kids the time they deserve. It also makes Middletown much more appealing as a community for people moving here. I think that is huge for our town."



Mrs. Miles' new kindergarten classroom at Nut Swamp School along with 22 others throughout the school district were ready for students on the first day of school

Middletown teachers and parents have been advocating for a full-day kindergarten for years knowing that research long supports the literacy advantages to a full-day program. Past Boards of Education have always cited the constraints of space and funding to providing a full-day kindergarten. This administration addressed the space issue in various ways. First, the recent change in how education is delivered in Middletown called "Core Plus More" has freed up space in the elementary schools as resource room teachers are now providing more services in the core classroom rather than pulling out students for special instruction. Secondly, many special subject classes like art, music and

computers were appropriated for additional space, and the special subjects will take place in the students' regular classroom (or in



In some schools art rooms were converted to full-day kindergarten and art will be delivered on a cart as art teacher Mary Henderson, will be doing in Nut Swamp. She states that the new curriculum requires that art coincide with the course work and those visuals will already be displayed in the core

media centers in the case of computer instruction.) This dovetails well with the new IDEAL/LEADS literacy model where special subject curriculum was rewritten to complement and reinforce the core curriculum. In further identifying appropriate space, in some instances libraries were relocated. Third, classrooms that were previously used for the multi-age program were easily converted to full-day kindergarten classroom. These decisions enabled the district to keep all students attending kindergarten in their own home school, a huge and very desirable outcome.

The number of kindergarten classrooms more than doubled from 14 to 37 with the need for 23 new spaces to be outfitted. The kindergartens have been capped at 24 students, and each teacher is assisted by a full-time paraprofessional in the classroom.

Superintendent Bilbao comments on this herculean feat to ready these classrooms during the two summer months for the first day of school, “We are exceptionally proud of all our hardworking staff who met the challenge to convert many spaces in the 12 buildings for our 23 additional kindergarten classrooms over the summer recess. Their efforts were extraordinary.”

Every class had a fully equipped and completed classroom ready for students when school opened. The district was able to do this by only making conversions and changes that did not require the State Department of Education (DOE) approval which takes a minimum of 90 days. The only exception to this occurred in Middletown Village School where a library was relocated to its original space to create a two classroom configuration that originally occupied the area. However, DOE approval is required to replace the wall, and a temporary wall was installed until that time.



Middletown Village Principal Karen Zupancic addresses a new kindergarten class on the first day of school. To add the needed two kindergarten classes to accommodate a new full-day of kindergarten, the library was relocated to its original space and a temporary wall was erected awaiting DOE approval for the construction of a permanent wall.

The cost obstacle was addressed with a

significant repositioning of staff made possible by the new way special education is delivered in the district as well as the inclusion of staff from the multi-age program. The latter was replaced by full-day kindergarten. Therefore, only five additional teacher positions were needed to staff the kindergartens. The allocation of ARRA (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act) funds within the school budget freed up funding to hire the new positions while remaining neutral to the budget.

Administration states that continued transitional savings over time will replace those funds after the ARRA funding ceases.

Board President Laura Agin comments on Middletown’s new full-day kindergarten program, “This Board is thrilled to have finally implemented a long-time community priority. It is also amazing to me how we could accomplish this in just three short months. Our first presentation to the community took place on June 4th and by September

3rd it was done. My compliments go to our outstanding administration and staff who were able to mobilize to meet this ambitious goal.”

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For the first time in 18 years, veteran kindergarten teacher Maria Fitzgerald will be teaching one kindergarten instead of two half day programs as Middletown successfully implements full-day kindergarten this school year.



Some schools lost their computer room to full-day kindergarten with the computers relocated to the library where instruction will now take place in a true media center.

