

# MIDDLETOWN TOWNSHIP BOARD OF EDUCATION

59 Tindall Road  
Middletown, NJ 07748  
Phone (732) 671-3850  
Fax: (732) 615-9351  
www.middletownk12.org

Contact: Karen L. Bilbao, Superintendent

Phone: 732-671-3850; ext. 1002  
[bilbaok@middletownk2.org](mailto:bilbaok@middletownk2.org)

Marianne Kligman  
Media Relations, [klig30662@aol.com](mailto:klig30662@aol.com)  
732-758-9089; 732-586-1232 (cell)

## Press Release FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 20, 2008

### Middletown Prepares for New State Mandates and New High School Design

Middletown: Over the past two years, the Middletown School District has been instituting major instructional reform in its kindergarten to 8<sup>th</sup> grade curriculum in an attempt to improve its students' performance and literacy rates. The adoption of the state model, LEADS, has already borne fruit in dramatically improved test scores on the eighth grade NJASK Language Arts test. In an attempt to further this reform in the high schools, Assistant Superintendent for Accountability Fred Carrigg has been teaching an evening course for Middletown English, social studies and special education teachers called *New Designs for College Readiness—Secondary School Reform*. The class has been designed to prepare Middletown's high schools to implement the new state proposed high school reform, which will be phased in over the next eight years but includes testing changes for the current school year. Eventually, graduation requirements will be altered in an attempt to significantly increase the rigor of New Jersey's high school programs.

Mr. Carrigg, a former official at the New Jersey Department of Education, recently invited his former colleague, Dr. Jay Doolan, the Assistant Commissioner of Educational Standards and Programs, to speak to his educators' class to discuss the upcoming state mandated and proposed changes and what it means for New Jersey's high schools. In explaining the impetus for the state changes, Dr. Doolan reported very sobering statistics which should concern all Americans. Increased globalization now forces our young people to compete in a shrinking world for which they are being woefully unprepared educationally.

While the shocking 30% high school drop-out rate in our country has been well reported, many may not be aware that of those high school seniors who do graduate, only 40% actually go to college, and of that number only 18% graduate in six years with a 4-year college degree. Other countries exhibit much healthier college graduation rates and score much higher than the United States in the important subjects of math and science, subjects which are key for tomorrow's job opportunities and the growth of America's GNP. While the United States has suffered an incredible loss of wealth during this historical financial crisis, every day it suffers another great loss of human talent in idle, unemployed, under-educated youth who are not contributing to the labor force.

Dr. Doolan explained that while New Jersey may boast the highest graduation rate in the country at 80-90%, only 25% of NJ graduates complete a four-year college degree within six years. Indicative of this is the high rate of remediation classes that both two-year and four-year colleges require entering freshmen to take. Many students are so discouraged with these expensive, non-credit courses they just



*Middletown Township School District recently invited Dr. Jay Doolan, the Assistant Commissioner of Educational Standards and Programs to talk to our staff on upcoming changes and what it means for New Jersey's high schools.*

drop out of college. We are simply not doing a good job of preparing our students for higher education at the high school level.

To address this national crisis, the National Governors Association in concert with The Alliance for Excellent Education promoted the National Diploma Project (NDP). This initiative studied and documented the crisis, which led to the establishment of the High School Redesign project to revamp the high school curriculum for increased rigor, improved graduation rates and better student preparation for college and/or employment. Thirty-two states, including New Jersey, currently participate in the implementation of the NDP goals. Key to the High School Redesign project is the concept that all students graduate high school prepared to go to college, if they so choose.

Dr. Doolan is charged with developing New Jersey's High School Redesign project, which portends to transform the way we approach high school education.

He stated, "Our educational model was based on a 19<sup>th</sup> century industrial work force and has changed very little since." He added, "We must figure out how to better engage our students to keep them in school... Ask any student in America what they think of high school and they almost always reply, 'It's boring.'"

Dr. Doolan explained that the new education model should be based on a student-centered learning environment with emphasis placed on strong administrative leadership, innovative teaching strategies to better engage students, and on promoting a personalization of the learning experience. The latter can be accomplished with such ideas as an adult mentor for each student and small learning communities, which reduce the institutionalization of the high school experience.

In articulating this broad outline, not much detail was offered by Dr. Doolan on just how the new model could be designed. However, to stimulate the new high school design, the state will mandate new end of course tests in Algebra I and Biology which will be field tested this year. That is, for this year, all students must take the tests, but their results will not be weighted toward graduation. Future testing is recommended in Algebra II and a second lab science, most likely Chemistry. New tests will be developed for literacy assessment as the current 11<sup>th</sup> grade HSPA will be phased out.

Fred Carrigg comments, "It is New Jersey's policy to test first so that school districts can figure out how to design programs to meet the requirements. It is up to the school district to develop the curriculum with the state's broad guidelines or follow a best practices model."

New rigorous graduation requirement will also be instituted over time recommending that most core courses be worth (5 credits) with a mandatory 120 credits required for graduation, an increase of 10 credits overall. (Middletown currently requires 120 credits to graduate.) School districts must align their curriculum to new core curriculum standards which will be developed by the state for core subjects. This will require the re-vamping of current curriculum as well as additional teacher training.

Students will be required to also take four years of language arts literacy aligned to new standards; three years of mathematics including Algebra I, Geometry and Algebra II, three years of science including Biology, Chemistry and an additional lab science, three years of social studies including Integrated Civics, Economics, Geography, U.S. History and global content, and specifically, a half year, or 2.5 credit, dedicated economics course. All other core curriculum courses and requirements remain the same in physical education, world languages, visual and performing arts, technology, career education and consumer, and family and life skills.

As the program will be phased in over eight years, the exact details have not yet been worked out. School districts will also be required to provide on-line course work for students who will be required to complete at least one on-line course. Dr. Doolan commented that on-line education is the future wave of education (although, New Jersey is currently the only state not to have yet established a virtual school.) The State Department of Education is in the process of investigating whether to create its own on-line school, or to contract with another state to utilize their on-line school. Most importantly, the State will establish a P-16 council for their curriculum recommendations to assure that all levels of our educational system be aligned to one another. School districts are also being encouraged to

implement, N.J. SMART, a recently developed on-line data collection system, which will establish an electronic file to follow students from pre-school to college.

As is often the case with new state mandates, no additional state funding is forthcoming. As additional expenses will undoubtedly be required to implement the new high school design program, Dr. Doolan suggested that school districts explore grant opportunities and foundations for additional funding needs.

Middletown, is already acting to implement the new mandates. Next year, Middletown will move most Biology classes to 9<sup>th</sup> grade replacing Fundamentals of Science. (Except for honors classes, Biology is currently offered in sophomore year.) Additionally, the 12<sup>th</sup> grade British Literature course is being totally revamped next year to provide graduating seniors with more college-ready skills. These include more emphasis on reading non-fiction (necessary for research in thesis writing,) improving reading comprehension and expository writing.

Middletown Superintendent Karen Bilbao comments, “With our previous reform efforts having been concentrated on early literacy and the k-8 population, now it is time to address our high schools. In implementing this new mandate, which is critical for America’s global competitiveness, Middletown will provide the necessary curriculum revision and teacher training so that all our graduates can have the opportunity to attend their first year of college without the need for any remediation, and therefore, graduate from college in the prescribed timeframe. For those graduates that elect to join the workforce instead of attend college, they should possess the skills to immediately become productive members of their communities.”