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## Press Release

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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#### **Middletown School District to Strictly Enforce Residency Requirements**

Middletown: In these very difficult economic times, school districts must be extremely vigilant about every dollar they spend of taxpayer money. For this purpose, and in the interest of balancing class size, the Middletown Township School District (MTSD) wants to inform our public that we will be redoubling our efforts to enforce residency and sending school requirements. This is a very important issue for Middletown, the largest school district in Monmouth County, which encompasses 17 schools.

David Healy, MTSD Assistant Superintendent responsible for enforcing residency requirement policy, comments, "Middletown has a great school system in a very safe and nurturing environment. It is no wonder that residents from other towns might attempt to enroll their children in our schools under false pretenses. Our hope is to discourage this practice in order to avoid any expense for families or hardship to their children who will be redirected to their town's school when fraudulence is discovered."

To substantiate township residency for school enrollment in Middletown, the school district requires at least four forms of ID. These include, but are not limited to: tax bills, deeds, mortgages, leases, signed letters from landlords, as well as other supporting documents such as utility bills or other expenditures that prove attachment to the residence. Picture IDs and pay stubs with the new address go a long way in establishing current residency.

In addition to the Department of Education regulations, N.J.A.C. 6A:22, prohibits such conduct. New Jersey State law, specifically N.J.S.A. 18A:38-1(c), provides that any person who fraudulently allows a child of another person to use his/her residence for school admission purposes is guilty of a disorderly persons offense, which is punishable under the New Jersey Criminal Code. Depending upon the circumstances, the Middletown School District may have an obligation to report such conduct to the Police Department for appropriate action. District Attendance Officer Susan Schriener-Awom has noted an increase in fraudulent enrollments over the past three years.

MTSD has employed very diligent measures to monitor enrollment status. Questionable enrollments, such as possible forged documents, are flagged for further investigation. With the increase in domicile and affidavit student applications enrollment status is routinely verified. (Domicile student applications pertain to students who live with their parent at a third party Middletown address. Affidavit student applications pertain to students who reside with someone other than their parent at a Middletown address.) Ms. Schriener-Awom often travels to the township addresses where children are stated to live and observes if the child emerges from the home in the morning or is being dropped off. She has also visited homes to check that a child is really living at the stated address.

She states, “I want to see the bed the student sleeps in and the clothes and possessions that he or she uses. It is really in the family’s best interest to be honest about their actual domicile arrangement.”

For families who are discovered to have enrolled their children illegally in the district, they will be asked to leave the district and will be required to pay back the district for any time spent in district illegally. This year alone, the district has collected over \$10,000 in tuition reimbursement.

It is MTSD’s current policy not to accept tuition students. According to MTSD Superintendent Karen Bilbao, the only exception to that policy may occur in a special education “self-contained” program where there is room within the proscribed student-to-teacher ratio. In these cases, recommendations come from other school districts that need to place their students in a special program which their school system does not offer.

MTSD will also be discouraging any parental requests to allow students to attend a district school other than their designated school. This is done to maintain the sensitive balance between school populations so that all class sizes are within district parameters. Excessive requests to attend a non-designated school also tie up limited administrator’s time, posing a hidden cost to the taxpayer. Middletown has traditionally maintained a very low administrative ratio to students versus other school districts as evidenced by School Report Card statistics and by State of New Jersey recognition.

David Healy comments, “In the past, particularly during times of school construction projects, there may have been an imbalance between school enrollments and special school attendance requests were allowed. That is not the case anymore, and the current sending school guidelines are designed to balance our populations within each school. If a student lives in the High School South (HSS) district they will go to HSS, if they live in the High School North (HSN) school district they will go to HSN. The only exception continues to be for students who live in the Middletown Village Elementary School District.”

Middletown Village elementary students are the only students sent to Thompson Middle School who are designated to attend HSN. These students have historically been allowed the choice to attend HSS, as long as their parents provide transportation. (This is done as a courtesy to those students who may wish to attend high school with the same students with whom they have forged relationships during middle school.)

In the case of transfers within a school year for students whose custodial parent or family moves from one part of Middletown to another, students will be immediately transferred to the sending school of their new address. The policy only allows those students in the pivotal years of grades 5, 8 or 12 to remain in their current school for the remainder of the school year. Those students must then attend the 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grades in the sending school of their new address.

Mr. Healy comments, “It is important that any parent who is planning to move within the town be aware of this policy, so they can make plans to least disrupt the lives of their children,”

He adds, “We do not wish to be punitive or cause distress to any child. However, we believe we owe it to (parents) and all our tax payers to assure that their property tax dollars go to educating the students of our school community, not to those who would try to falsely represent their addresses and other means of personal identification. We are constrained by the limits of a tight school budget to make every dollar count and reduce our expenses wherever possible. At the same time, we must do what is best for all our students in maintaining an equitable class size balance.”

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