



## Superintendent's Update - February 2008

### Models of Instruction that Support Literacy

With the implementation of LEADS (Literacy is Essential to Adolescent Development and Success) in the district's three middle schools, Middletown is moving forward toward its goal of increasing the rigor and relevance of instruction for all students. Last week at Thorne Middle School, a culminating celebration of an 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Unit on Civil Rights, called "Do the Right Thing", illustrated that some students read as many as 6 novels in that single marking period as compared to last school year, when students read three novels over the course of the full year. Beyond the novels, the students demonstrated the application of their connected learning through the presentation of final marking period projects, where they used Problem Based Learning techniques to create PowerPoint presentations, or created their own websites, or authored printed books to demonstrate their knowledge. Visitors came from the State Department of Education, other school districts, other schools in the district, and the press to view the culminating celebration.

According to Fred Carrigg, Middletown's District Director of Curriculum for the Humanities, K-12, and former Special Assistant for Literacy to the NJ Commissioner of Education, the LEADS model is research based, student centered, inclusive and interdisciplinary. It is focused on supporting adolescent reading and writing instruction while connecting these skills to the content areas through a strong emphasis on expository reading and writing. LEADS is based on unambiguous, universally accepted, good instruction. It is about the student, what he/she needs to know to be successful in high school and beyond. For example, we know that vocabulary is critical to successful comprehension and reading. We know

that memorization of disconnected words and their definition is the least effective strategy for students to integrate vocabulary. There is a need for multiple exposures to words in various content areas, which is accomplished through thematic planning, and multiple opportunities to use that vocabulary in meaningful ways (reading across the content areas, writing, oral presentations, projects). This is not a preferred way, but the universally accepted way. LEADS incorporates the highly successful strategy known as "Word Walls". Dr. Michael Kamil of Stanford University and a member of the National Reading Panel (2001) served as the national consultant, advisor, and reviewer of LEADS, which is the New Jersey State Model for middle grades literacy education.

The elementary component to the LEADS model is called IDEAL, which focuses on the critical issue of the early literacy acquisition of young children. At the February 5<sup>th</sup> District-Wide In-Service Training, members of the NJ State Dept. of Education's Office of Literacy came to Middletown to present to our elementary teachers an overview of the IDEAL model and the ways in which the Middletown District plans to implement the model in the elementary schools next year. Intensive training is planned for our elementary teachers in the spring of this year to insure that all of our teachers are fully prepared to implement the model in September of 2008.

Full descriptions of the LEADS and IDEAL models are available on the District Website ([www.middletownk12.org](http://www.middletownk12.org)). The models will form the basis of the Language Arts/Literacy block of time, which is planned to be increased to two hours next year in the elementary schools and will integrate social studies themes and expository readings.

## Improving the District's World Language Program

The 2008-09 proposed World Language delivery model in the elementary schools will be aligned with the core curriculum and articulated through the grade levels in order to improve its effectiveness. Though the district decided to increase the frequency of delivery of services in the Elementary World Language Program during the 2005-06 School Year, the delivery model of two-times per cycle offered only slight improvement because the duration of the sessions was only twenty minutes each in length. For the upcoming 2008-09 School Year, the district is planning to replace the SAIL Program in the special subject rotation with World Lan-

guage, which will be a full, forty-minute period, and then deliver an additional twenty-minute session within the six-day cycle in order to maintain the frequency of twice per cycle. The benefit of the frequency is to insure that students remember the communicative language that was taught in the previous period without having to spend much of the next period refreshing and reviewing the previous learning.

To improve articulation through the grades, Spanish will be offered as a sixth-grade option instead of only French, so students who want to continue to develop their Spanish language

skills may do so. The hope is that some students will develop a high level of communicative proficiency in Spanish by the time they reach high school, and more students will move into advanced placement courses in junior and senior year. The ability to communicate fluently in Spanish is also an important workplace readiness skill. Fluent communication in any second language is highly valued as a skill in the workplace, so Middletown's World Language Program goal is to increase our students' level of second language proficiency.

# Gifted and Talented Education Through the Grades

The delivery of instruction for gifted and talented students fits perfectly into the IDEAL and LEADS models of instruction. Services for gifted and talented students can now be connected into the core curriculum through full articulation from grades Kindergarten through twelve. The delivery of services will be assessed for effectiveness based on the district's goal to increase the number of students who achieve at advanced proficient levels on state assessments.

With the research failing to identify a best practice, and the recommendations of the district's Gifted and Talented Task Force to develop a more comprehensive and connected service that was articulated across the grade levels, the district decided to align the services for gifted and talented students to the core curriculum within the IDEAL and LEADS models. The next step is the move to an Honors Program in the 7<sup>th</sup> Grade that is aligned with the existing Honors Math Program and the successful Honors High School Programs.

Beginning in Kindergarten, teachers will assess the individual reading level of every student, so they will know early who is reading "above level". They are using a formative assessment of reading called the DRA2. Teachers will differentiate instruction through our model so high levels of reading ability will be addressed. When the class moves into guided reading groups, with about 4-5 students in a small group, "above-level" readers will be grouped together and any co-teaching will occur at this time. During the literacy block, from forty minutes to an hour will be devoted to guided reading.

In Grades 4 and 5, co-teachers will specifically support students identified as gifted and talented by instructing the guided reading groups using advanced

reading materials, fiction and non-fiction, based on social studies themes and will also start these students off on project or problem-based learning activities that are fully inter-disciplinary and will continue in center-based group work throughout the week. The projects will be assessed by the classroom teacher with input from the co-teacher, and the projects will be fully connected to the curriculum. Many teachers have already been trained in project or problem based learning if they have taken courses with consultants brought into the district over the last 2 ½ years. The intensive training that will be provided in the Spring of 2008 will insure that our teachers are fully prepared to implement the model and be able to meet the needs of students identified as exceptional. So the delivery model in grades 4 and 5 will be accomplished next year through in-class co-teaching, 2-3 days per cycle, 40-60 minutes per day.

In the sixth grade, all students will be heterogeneously scheduled and the LEADS initiative will amply address the students with high ability through rigorous units of study, advanced level materials and problem-based learning activities. In one sixth grade unit, for example, advanced students will be reading "*The Hobbit*", while students functioning in the average range will read, "*Harry Potter and The Prisoner of Ascaban*". The theme of this unit is "Good vs. Evil", and the literature will be connected to historic figures through expository readings.

By Grade 7, students will be assessed with a matrix to move into the Honors Humanities Program. The matrix follows the one designed for the 7th Grade Honors Mathematics program. The Honors Matrix process and sequence of courses will continue through the 12th grade and expand further into Advanced Placement courses.

The recommendations for the changes to

the delivery of gifted and talented services came from a task force of teachers, parents, and administrators. The recommendations were taken and reviewed by the Central Administration to align them with our Strategic Plan and our models of instruction. The reason for the investigation into the way the district was delivering the services came from concerns that gifted and talented services were not connected to the core curriculum, because they were delivered through a pull-out program that met only once every eight days in the elementary schools. Rather than a supplement or addition to a core literacy block of instruction, the services were delivered in place of core instruction. The new model of service delivery is designed to enhance the core and advance the learning while staying connected to the inter-disciplinary content being taught in the classroom. A constructivist approach to learning will be the philosophical approach, and research shows that gifted learners thrive in environments where they have opportunities to construct deeper meaning from content.

According to the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented (NRCGT), "No consensus exists in theory or in practice regarding the most appropriate delivery system for gifted and talented education (1994)". The NRCGT encouraged the examination of various types of programs for gifted and talented students. In conducting their research, investigators found that good programs exist in each of the four most frequently seen program types: within-class, pull-out, separate class and special school. When learning outcomes were compared across the four types, no single program arrangement fully addressed all the cognitive and affective needs of the gifted students. (Delcourt, M. and Evans, K. "*Qualitative Extensions of the Learning Outcomes Study*", 1994).

## Pilot Provisional Drivers Program

The Middletown School District is currently offering GDL (Graduated Drivers License) stickers to any parent of a GDL student who would like to voluntarily participate in this program. The stickers are available at our Central Office at 59 Tindall Road. Along with the stickers, additional information will be available for parents who may not be aware of all the state-mandated GDL restrictions.