



Superintendent's Update - September 2008

Welcome Back!

Evaluating Our Progress from 2007-08

In order to know we are on the right track, we need to evaluate the effectiveness of the programs and services we had in place in the 2007-2008 School Year. Analyzing data to evaluate our new initiatives is the key element in QSAC – *the Quality Single Accountability Continuum*. QSAC is the process that the State Department of Education is using to monitor all our programs and services this year.

We are happy to have the first, solid evidence that our major new initiative, LEADS (*Literacy is Essential to Adolescent Development and Success*) has been successful based on our scores on the 8th Grade NJ ASK (*Assessment of Skills and Knowledge*). I'd like to preface this report on our scores to say that the Commissioner of Education has announced that the scores on the 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th Grade NJ ASK have been adjusted this year in order to level the State Assessments from one grade to the next. The leveling means that a greater number of correct responses will be required in order for a student to be determined "proficient".

When the parents of students who exited Grades 5, 6, 7 and 8, receive their children's test profiles this month, many parents will find that their child, who was proficient in prior years, is "partially proficient" this year. A letter from the Commissioner of Education will accompany every test profile that is sent home. Questions and concerns should be raised with either the student's guidance counselor or the school principal. The change in score and rating may only be due to the leveling of the test and not the performance of the child. The only area that was not leveled was Language Arts (reading and writing) for the 8th Grade. The district had the opportunity to use our 8th Grade scores to compare to last year's Language Arts scores to

determine whether or not our LEADS initiative was working.

Assessment Results

I am very pleased to announce that significant progress was made in all three middle schools:

- ◆ *Thompson*: The percent of students who are proficient increased by five percentage points, from 90-95%.
- ◆ *Bayshore*: The percent of proficient students increased by 8.6 percentage points, from 84.9% to 93.5% .
- ◆ *Thorne*: The percent of proficient students increased by 8.4 percentage points, from 79.3% to 87.7%. The 'advanced proficient' category increased by 10 percentage points!

It should be noted that it is most difficult to make significant progress when scores are already high which was the case in some of our schools.

The test scores tell a story that we were anxiously anticipating to be true:

- ◆ Increasing the rigor of our instructional programs will have a real impact on student achievement!
- ◆ Raising the rigor means increasing the number of novels and non-fiction materials that students have to read in the classroom, as well as at home.
- ◆ Raising the rigor also means increasing the number of written pieces that a student needs to complete for their portfolio. In the middle schools, that number is at least one per week.
- ◆ Students have to participate in the completion of at least one project, known as a PBL (*Project Based Learning*) every marking period.

Professional Development

With the efficacy of our LEADS initiative validated by our test scores, we are now moving into full

implementation of LEADS in the upper elementary grades 3, 4 and 5. There will also be a transition of the methodology into the 9th grade.

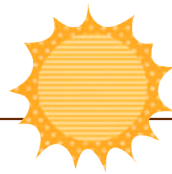
The LEADS training has been one of the most comprehensive professional development initiatives that the district has ever embarked upon. Over 175 teachers participated in training in the LEADS initiative this summer during week-long summer camps. There was also a mandatory training of two full days for all elementary teachers in the Spring of 2008.

The lower elementary grades participated, though their focus was on the acquisition of early literacy, a model called IDEAL:

- ◆ Primary teachers learned to assess their students through the DRA (*Developmental Reading Assessment*) and form guided reading groups based on the assessment results. Students can read materials that are at their instructional reading level, rather than assuming that every student in a grade reads at the same level.
- ◆ We are working to decrease the practice of referring students who are not reading at grade level for special education.
- ◆ Co-teaching will be the model used when students are in the classroom who need special education, academic assistance, or even gifted and talented services. In previous years, those students were instructed in a separate classroom.

When we evaluate the effectiveness of these new models in the elementary schools, we will anticipate improved pass rates on the NJ ASK and expect to see a decrease in the rate of referral to special education services.

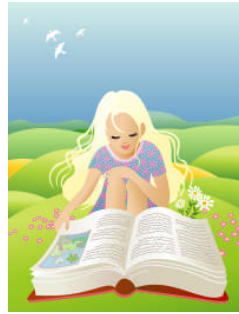
Effectiveness of our Summer Programs



Summer Reading and Math Literacy Program

The Summer Reading and Math Literacy Program ran for six weeks, which is a change from only 10 days in previous years. The program serviced 93 kindergarten students and 124 first grade students. The analysis conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the summer programs was based on the number of hours that each of the students attended. Research shows that the impact of a summer program can best be seen when students attend for 80 hours or more. Of the 93 kindergarten students who attended 80 hours or more, 57% caught up and are ready for first grade, and 95% made significant progress, in that they closed the achievement gap, advancing at least one level on the DRA. This data is very exciting because we can see that our program allowed kindergarten students who were assessed as being behind at the end of the school year to have an opportunity to get

back on track. What's really encouraging is that these students are likely to stay on track for the rest of their school career and may not need any other support services. Of the 124 first graders who attended the program for at least 80 hours, 93% closed the achievement gap, advancing at least 1 level. Again, this is wonderful news, not only in the great progress these students made but also in the large number of students from all over the district who were helped by these important programs.



Title One Summer Program

The other new summer program designed to get students back on track was the Title One Summer Program for students exiting 6th, 7th and 8th grades. Summer programs for older students are always more difficult to assess because the students' attendance is often

inconsistent. This program ran for six weeks and serviced approximately 80 students. The DRA was used to assess the students in the area of reading. A system called Learnia was used to assess the students in mathematics. Though results were not as dramatic as the primary grades program, they showed that students made progress in all the areas that were assessed, particularly in literary awareness, comprehension, and writing skills, which are skills that cross all subject areas.

The teachers provided a report that was shared with the administrators and the Board of Education, making suggestions for ways the program can be improved for next year.

Extended School Year Program

Our Extended School Year Program for students with

disabilities was a great success.

Students in the elementary phase of the program were at Nut Swamp School this summer because of the installation of the air conditioning units at New Monmouth School. The change in venue was revitalizing, and the playground and fields at Nut Swamp were utilized to full advantage for sports and recreation. A wide variety of academic and social learning experiences were provided, and the program culminated with a very successful Art Show that focused on the students learning about "The Masters", such as Rembrandt, Monet, and Picasso. The middle and high school program was once again located at High School North and featured community integration in the form of field trips and job internships.



New Memorandum of Agreement between School District and Law Enforcement Officials

New legislation has resulted in some changes in the way the local police will be interacting with school administrators when it comes to investigating juvenile crimes. Our administration and Board of Education are going to do everything possible to maximize parental participation when students have to be interviewed by the police.

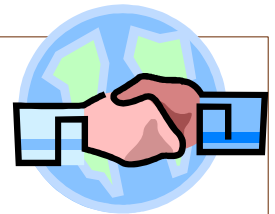
Middletown is very fortunate to have always had a very positive and cooperative working relationship with our local police department. The police are very important in helping us keep our schools safe. We don't expect that cooperative relationship to change with the new Memorandum of Agreement

(MOA). However, it is important to point out that the new MOA no longer requires parental consent in order for the police to interview a student in our schools. While we desire to maintain our cooperative spirit with the police department and will fully cooperate with the new agreement, our administrators will be making immediate efforts to contact parents when students need to be interviewed by police officers. We will ask the police officer if they can wait until the parent arrives before the interview begins. If the issue is emergent they will not wait, so it is very important for parents to provide several

ways they can be contacted by school administrators.

When a student is the "target of an investigation" the MOA does require parental contact but not parental consent to interrogate a student. If a parent cannot be reached, that interrogation can occur without the parent.

Our school district has had several meetings with our local police department, including our juvenile detectives, and we are certain that we will still enjoy that same level of cooperation we have always had, where the safety of all of our students comes first.



New Initiatives for 2008-2009

LEADS, IDEAL and our Co-Teaching Model that were described in the first article are the major new initiatives for the coming school year. A two-hour block of time has been established in the elementary schedule throughout the grades for IDEAL (Grades K-2) or LEADS (Grades 3-5), which involves the integration of language arts and social studies, into a "literacy block" for all the elementary grades. The new elementary schedule will also include a full hour block for mathematics and a full hour for science, though science will not occur daily in the schedule. It will occur three times in the six day cycle for Grades 1 and 2 and four times for Grades 3 through 5. Committees of teachers worked throughout the summer to create exciting units of instruction for the elementary LEADS and IDEAL initiative, that began with essential questions based on the Core Curriculum Content Standards and social studies themes. In the third grade, for example, a unit on ancient civilizations is called *Family Ties* and contains such driving questions as, "How do traditions, values and beliefs vary through diverse cultures?". Students will read fiction and non-fiction materials about ancient Greek and Roman civilizations, a theme that previously was not introduced until the sixth grade.

New books as well as technology will be in place for the opening of school. All fourth and fifth grade classrooms will have wireless access points, and 170 new mini-laptop computers have been purchased so that all fourth and fifth grade classrooms will have two laptops each, which is a great start. The laptops will allow students to conduct research for PBL's that connect to the LEADS units. Document cameras and SmartBoards are another major technology purchase that will enhance not only LEADS, but all our instructional initiatives.

In order to insure that all our elementary teachers have support in the implementation of the new literacy initiatives, the district has completed its plan to have one reading specialist in every elementary building. Reading specialists will provide on-site professional development and will be available to go into the classrooms every day to help the classroom teachers implement the new models.

There are other exciting initiatives that will be in place for the opening of the school year as well. In the area of world language, for example, we will have a new methodology in place for the opening of school that involves more communication and storytelling. In the elementary schools in Grades 1-5, students will have a full period (40 minutes) of Spanish and then a half period (20 minutes) during every six-day cycle. All elementary world language teachers were trained in the new method, called *Teaching Proficiency Through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS)*, in the Spring. What is really exciting is that every elementary school has its own Spanish teacher, so those teachers can really be a part of the fabric of the building, emphasizing the importance of the new world language program as a communicative initiative. It is the district's goal to have students really speaking the language by the time they leave elementary school and that Spanish will either transfer to support the learning of another language or the student will continue in Spanish in middle and high school, and reach high levels of proficiency, taking Advanced Placement courses by the end of high school.



In the area of mathematics, the methodology that has been successfully working in the elementary and middle schools will be transitioning to the high schools. The methodology is one of student investigation and problem-solving, rather than the teacher demonstrating the process used to solve a problem and the students emulating that process. Middle and high school teachers have been collaborating all year on ways to transition the methodology, during staff in-service days and by visiting each other's classrooms while in session. Texts that feature the new methodology were purchased for 9th grade math classes, and supplies were purchased for all teachers who teach those courses in the high schools.

Middletown Day Celebration

September 27, 2008 11 a.m.- 6 p.m.

Middletown Day 2008 celebration will take place on Saturday, September 27th from 11:00 am to 6:00 pm on the great lawn at Croydon Hall. There will be games, food, a circus and craft vendors as well as live entertainment by the Beth Anne Clayton Band, The Passions, and Kenny Vance and the Planotones.

