

MIDDLETOWN LEADS

WHAT IS MIDDLETOWN LEADS?

Middletown Leads is a weekly newsletter intended to connect the Middletown community by providing information about the civic undertakings of the Town.

SCHOOL UNIFICATION - JUNE 17, 2019

The issue of school regionalization has inspired more interest and commentary than most other topics on the Town Council docket, especially following the rejection of Newport's request that Middletown engage in discussion. Resident opinions seem to be based on one of two perspectives: 1) It was all about the money, or 2) It was all about getting the facts. The spirit of fairness requires a look at both perspectives.

IT WAS ALL ABOUT THE MONEY

Based on the slides that were used at Town Council meetings, full regionalization would be more cost effective:

Full regionalization

Proposed Regional School District – New High School

Cost to construct new building	\$150,000,000
Reimbursement:	
Base (35%)	52,500,000
Regionalization bonus (26%)	39,000,000
Temporary bonus incentive (20%)	<u>30,000,000</u>
	121,500,000
Net cost	28,500,000
Middletown share	14,250,000
Newport share	14,250,000

It should be noted that, in spite of the reimbursement rate of more than 80%, there is an underlying reluctance even among supporters, to support full regionalization

Nevertheless, full regionalization would not affect students in grades K-8 who would remain in the same schools in the individual towns. Students in Middletown would still attend Aquidneck, Forest Ave., and Gaudet Schools just as students in Newport would remain at Pell and Thompson.

However, full regionalization is a concept that is a little too revolutionary to be accepted, regardless of the higher reimbursement rate.

On the other hand, the concept of unification of the high schools alone has more supporters for several reasons, not the least of which are the greater educational opportunities in a school of 1200 rather than two small separate schools of 600 each, where programs are more limited.

Partial regionalization-

Proposed Unified High School

Cost to construct new building	\$150,000,000
Reimbursement:	
Base (35%)	52,500,000
Regionalization bonus (8%)	12,000,000
Temporary bonus incentive (20%)	<u>30,000,000</u>
	94,500,000
Net cost	55,500,000
Middletown share	27,750,000
Newport share	27,750,000

IT WAS ALL ABOUT GETTING THE FACTS

The other side of the coin can be best represented by the sentiments expressed in some of the letters to the Town Council following its vote against engaging in discussions with Newport:

“As a resident of Middletown I would like to strongly recommend that the council agree to explore the option of merging the two high schools. There are many advantages to having a larger combined school that are certainly worth the council’s exploration. While exploring the option of combining the schools does not bind the council, not exploring this option does not allow for an informed decision on this issue.”

“Your shortsighted dismissal of a study to explore options to bring Middletown High School into the 21st century and to improve its failing educational programs leaves me disheartened and angry that those who supposedly represent the citizens of this town will not listen to the majority!”

“I am most interested in and concerned with the tax ramifications each option holds for those of us who live, or have businesses in Middletown, so I greatly appreciate your willingness to enter into discussions about how best to serve the students and our communities, while maintaining a healthy living and business environment for all.”

“As a senior leader in a top technology company (Microsoft) for 14 years, I am very close to the challenges we have as a country, and in particular on this island, in the education and skills gap we are facing for 21st century jobs. I also see first hand the difference in the quality of education and student outcomes coming from other states (notably our neighbors in Massachusetts), the impact high quality education has on the local economy and the open minded growth mindset that these communities embrace.”

“As I speak to residents of Middletown about whether the High Schools should be unified or not I hear strong FEELINGS for and against along with many being unsure. FEELINGS are important, but facts that are examined in light of economic, social, educational and administrative issues related to unifying our schools or not should weigh heavily on our decision making process.

For this reason, I urge the Town Council on June 17th to vote to continue the conversation and to study all the facts before we as a community approve or disapprove the unification of our high school with that of Newport. We owe it to our students, to our children and our grandchildren to examine this issue as carefully and factually as we can.

I implore you to respect the wishes of your constituents and take up the question again in a future council meeting for a yes vote to proceed with non-binding discussions to find out the FACTS and then let the citizens evaluate those facts for a decision.”

FOOTNOTE

Editorial essays appear occasionally at the following website: <https://middletownleads.blogspot.com/>