

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.

NO REGIONALIZATION – IT WAS ALL ABOUT THE MONEY

On June 17, 2019, the Middletown Council voted 5 – 2 not to join in the discussion of regionalizing schools requested by Newport Superintendent of Schools Coleen Jermain. The decision of the majority was based on the financial impact to Middletown of \$14 M for K-12 regionalization or \$28 M for high school unification.

At the July 1, 2019 Town Council meeting, as requested by Council President Sylvia, the Town Administrator made a 2 hr. PowerPoint presentation of slides intending to demonstrate the validity of the majority's decision based on projected costs.

HIGH SCHOOL UNIFICATION – IT WAS ALL ABOUT THE KIDS

Following that presentation, another perspective was presented for consideration, based on the potential benefit to the education of high school students.

The presentation began with a recall of the concerns of the Town Council during the FY 20 budget process the previous month by the slide presented at that time (see *Middletown Leads*, May 11, 2019).

Based on its concerns about what was considered mismanagement by the School Department, the Town Council was reminded of a statement attributed to Albert Einstein: “The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again, but expecting different results.”

It was stated that, although high school consolidation would not solve all financial and quality of education problems... it would have a significant positive effect on high school education and the future prospects for students. A critical mass of students would result in a larger, more diverse program of opportunities, preparing a workforce that would attract economic development to Aquidneck Island.

Following was a comparative analysis of 5 RI district high schools (including MHS) and 4 RI regional high schools with a goal of demonstrating that there was a direct correlation between the ratio of teachers to students and the costs for instruction (i.e., a lower ratio = more teachers = higher per pupil costs.)

In a comparison of Barrington, Middletown, North Kingstown, and Portsmouth High Schools the lowest ratio of teachers to students (10:1) resulted in the highest per pupil cost – in Middletown - \$18,111 for the smallest enrollment (633).

In a comparison of Exeter/West Greenwich, Mt. Hope, and Ponaganset Regional High Schools, the highest rate of teachers to students (14 : 1) resulted in the lowest per pupil cost - \$19,329 for the largest enrollment (889), which would still be considered a small school in comparison with North Kingstown (1,383) and Barrington (1,116).

Two schools were identified as Career & Technical Schools in the data analysis: Rogers High School and Chariho Regional High School. The teacher student ratio was the same at both schools (13 : 1), but the costs were higher at Rogers HS (\$19,726 for 632 students) than at Chariho (\$18,326 for 1,090 students).

In a review of the PSAT and SAT assessment scores, it was concluded that there is no strong correlation between assessment and enrollment.

In regard to the number of Advanced Placement courses available in each of the 9 schools, the conclusion was that there is no strong correlation between Advanced Placement course availability and enrollment.

Following a review of Middletown's 2018 summary of scores, it was concluded that the exam results (73/169 scores of 3 or above) raised questions about prior knowledge and eligibility for Advanced Placement. As a result, the conclusion was that there is no correlation between enrollment on AP or VHS courses with test scores, and the number of Advanced Placement courses offered is not a good measure of high achievement.

In regard to graduation rates, which fluctuate from year to year, the conclusion was that there is no direct correlation between enrollment and graduation rate.

A review of the Programs of Studies of the 9 schools reflected comparable offerings in the basics – English, Math, Science, Social Studies, and Computer Science. However, the larger schools provide more areas of study – Business, Family & Computer Science, Theatre, etc.

Larger enrollment provided more electives in areas such as the Arts (including drama), Foreign Language (more languages, longer sequences), and Music (more electives and performance groups).

Some subjects were unavailable at smaller schools (Business, Computer & Family Science, and Practical Arts.)

The availability of career programs/Electives depended on the size of the enrollment. All schools offered 3-4 course sequential programs leading to certificates and/or internships, but there was more availability at schools with larger enrollments.

It was stated that some students in smaller schools left their home schools to attend career-related programs. Others gave up their career interests.

Larger size provided programs, reduced scheduling conflicts, and made more sections of career-related electives available to more students.

Contrasting with the higher per pupil costs in smaller schools, substantial evidence supports the link between the academic opportunity in larger schools and economic growth.

Larger schools with more learning opportunities contribute skilled workers to a job market that brings business and investment, raises property values, increases the tax base, and results in a lower and/or stable tax rate.

There is a strong correlation between enrollment and educational opportunity. In Middletown, small size results in questionable student placement in AP classes, a limited # of academic electives, a limited # of hands-on electives, limited availability in scheduling, and an absence of workplace skill and training programs.

Larger size results in placement in AP classes based on past performance, greater diversity of academic and hands-on electives, more scheduling flexibility and course availability, and more career-related programs/electives that meet the needs of business and industry and promote local economic development.

It was stated that schools are the economic engine of the community. Size correlates with opportunity. Opportunity produces a workforce. A workforce increases the job market. A job market brings more investment. Investment brings economic growth, a higher tax base, and local prosperity.

So, as stated in this second presentation. it's not just about the money. It's about investment in the kids, who are Middletown's future.

DECISION

The motion – to engage in discussions with Newport regarding a unified high school with stipulations related to equal control and municipal financial oversight even if it required new legislation – was defeated.

FOOTNOTE

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