2008 No Child Left Behind–Blue Ribbon Schools Program

U.S. Department of Education

[X] Public [ ] Private

Cover Sheet

Type of School (Check all that apply)

[ ] Elementary [X] MIddle [ ] High [ ] K-12
[ ] Charter [ ] Title I [ ] Magnet [ ] Choice

Name of Principal Dr. Deborah Keller Boccanfuso PhD
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other) (As it should appear in the official records)

Official School Name Middlesex Middle School
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 204 Hollow Tree Ridge Rd.
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

Darien	Connecticut	06820-4023
City	State	Zip Code+4(9 digits total)

County Fairfield State School Code Number* 035

Telephone (203) 655-2518 Fax (203) 655-1627

Web site/URL www.darienps.org/middlesex E-mail dboccanfuso@darienps.org

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 3, and certify that to the best of my knowledge all information is accurate.

Date

Principal's Signature

Name of Superintendent Mr. Donald Fiftal
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Darien Public Schools Tel. (203) 656-7412

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 3, and certify that to the best of my knowledge all information is accurate.

Date

(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board President/Chairperson Mr. John Bolton
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 3, and certify that to the best of my knowledge all information is accurate.

Date

(School Board President's/Chairperson's Signature)

**Private Schools: If the information requested is not applicable, write N/A in the space.*

Mail by commercial carrier (FedEx, UPS) or courier original signed cover sheet to Aba Kumi, Director, NCLB-Blue Ribbon Schools Program, US Department of Education, 400 Maryland Avenue, SW, Room 5E103, Washington DC 20202-8173.

PART I - ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION

Include this page in the school's application as page 2.

The signatures on the first page of this application certify that each of the statements below concerning the school's eligibility and compliance with U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights (OCR) requirements is true and correct.

1. The school has some configuration that includes grades K-12. (Schools on the same campus with one principal, even K-12 schools, must apply as an entire school.)

2. The school has made adequate yearly progress each year for the past two years and has not been identified by the state as "persistently dangerous" within the last two years. To meet final eligibility, the school must meet the state's adequate yearly progress requirement in the 2007-2008 school year.

3. If the school includes grades 7 or higher, the school must have foreign language as a part of its core curriculum.

4. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2002 and has not received the No Child Left Behind–Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years.

5. The nominated school or district is not refusing OCR access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district wide compliance review.

6. OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to the school district concluding that the nominated school or the district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if OCR has accepted a corrective action plan from the district to remedy the violation.

7. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the nominated school or the school district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution's equal protection clause.

8. There are no findings of violations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in a U.S. Department of Education monitoring report that apply to the school or school district in question; or if there are such findings, the state or district has corrected, or agreed to correct, the findings.

PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

All data are the most recent year available. Throughout the document, round numbers to the nearest whole number to avoid decimals, except for numbers below 1, which should be rounded to the nearest tenth.

DISTRICT (Question 1-2 not applicable to private schools)

1. Number of schools in the district:

5	Elementary schools
1	Middle schools
	Junior High Schools
1	High schools
	Other
7	TOTAL

2. District Per Pupil Expenditure: 13156

   Average State Per Pupil Expenditure: 11558

SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools)

3. Category that best describes the area where the school is located:

   [ ] Urban or large central city
   [ ] Suburban school with characteristics typical of an urban are
   [X] Suburban
   [ ] Small city or town in a rural area
   [ ] Rural

4. 4 Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school.

   If fewer than three years, how long was the previous principal at this school?

5. Number of students as of October 1 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent in applying school only:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total	Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
Pre K			0	**7**	183	174	357
K			0	**8**	177	194	371
1			0	**9**			0
2			0	**10**			0
3			0	**11**			0
4			0	**12**			0
5			0	**Other**			0
6	210	179	389				
TOTAL STUDENTS IN THE APPLYING SCHOOL							1117

6. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:

0 %	American Indian or Alaska Native
4 %	Asian or Pacific Islander
1 %	Black or African American
2 %	Hispanic or Latino
93 %	White
100 %	**TOTAL**

Use only the five standard categories in reporting the racial/ethnic composition of the school.

7. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the past year 1 %

This rate should be calculated using the grid below. The answer to (6) is the mobility rate.

(1)	Number of students who transferred to the school after October 1 until the end of the year	8
(2)	Number of students who transferred from the school after October 1 until the end of the year	8
(3)	Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	16
(4)	Total number of students in the school as of October 1	1100
(5)	Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row	0.01
(6)	Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	1

8. Limited English Proficient students in the school: 1 %

5 Total Number Limited English Proficient

Number of languages represented: 5

Specify languages: Polish, Japanese, Albanian, Italian, Korean

9. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 1 %

Total number students who qualify: 10

If this method does not produce an accurate estimate of the percentage of students from low income families, or the school does not participate in the federally supported lunch program, specify a more accurate estimate, tell why the school chose it, and explain how it arrived at this estimate.

10. Students receiving special education services: 11 %

98 Total Number of Students Served

Indicate below the number of students with disabilities according to conditions designated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Do not add additional categories.

5	Autism	0	Orthopedic Impairment
0	Deafness	19	Other Health Impairment
0	Deaf-Blindness	48	Specific Learning Disability
4	Emotional Disturbance	20	Speech or Language Impairment
0	Hearing Impairment	0	Traumatic Brain Injury
1	Mental Retardation	0	Visual Impairment Including Blindness
1	Multiple Disabilities		

11. Indicate number of full time and part time staff members in each of the categories below:

	Number of Staff	
	Full-time	**Part-time**
Administrator(s)	3	1
Classroom teachers	75	10
Special resource teachers/specialists	33	0
Paraprofessionals	17	0
Support Staff	15	0
Total number	143	11

12. Average school student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 — 14 **: 1**

13. Show the attendance patterns of teachers and students as a percentage. Please explain a high teacher turnover rate. The student dropout rate is defined by the state. The student drop-off rate is the difference between the number of entering students and the number of exiting students from the same cohort. (From the same cohort, subtract the number of exiting students from the number of entering students; divide that number by the number of entering students; multiply by 100 to get the percentage drop-off rate.) Briefly explain in 100 words or fewer any major discrepancy in attendance, dropout or the drop-off rates. Only middle and high schools need to supply dropout rates, and only high schools need to supply drop-off rates.

	2006-2007	2005-2006	2004-2005	2003-2004	2002-2003
Daily student attendance	90 %	90 %	90 %	95 %	92 %
Daily teacher attendance	91 %	89 %	91 %	93 %	92 %
Teacher turnover rate	7 %	8 %	11 %	10 %	10 %
Student drop out rate (middle/high	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %
Student drop-off rate (high school)	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %

Please provide all explanations below

PART III - SUMMARY

Middlesex Middle School is located in Darien, CT which serves 1117 students, grades 6 -8. The district mission and philosophy states that 'schools exist for children' and the system is responsible for 'developing, to the utmost, the potential of all children entrusted to it'.

As a middle school, we believe it is our mission to educate the whole person, focusing on academic success, but realizing that emotional, social, physical awareness, along with the development of responsible behavior are integral parts of the development of an adolescent. We encourage our students to take advantage of opportunities to explore their talents, create new knowledge, and seek ways to serve the greater community. We believe that these experiences will prove to develop lifelong learners who strive to achieve academic and personal success. For this reason, it is important that we strive to expose our students to a wide variety of experiences that nurture the development of skills they will require for the 21st century.

Since all of our students are important to the fabric of our community, citizenship is a critical component of our day to day expectations for our students. Our code of behavior is the foundation of how our students are expected to take responsibility for themselves and for each other. In our building, kindness, respect, and service are the norm. In addition, our students are constantly asked to look beyond the school walls for ways to serve others in the greater community. Our student council is run by an elected executive council; however, all students have the opportunity to represent their homeroom peers at the weekly meetings. The student council promotes the process of encouraging students to bring forth their ideas to the executive board so that their intentions can be converted into action and all students can work to raise money and awareness for a host of community concerns.

Academically, our students are also exposed to a variety of challenging opportunities and are held accountable to give their best efforts in and outside of the classroom. All instructional and curricular programs, along with professional development activities for teachers, are filtered through the lens of 'what's best for the students?' Our students over the past five years have been asked to apply their knowledge in assessments, projects, and classroom activities. Our teachers are applying new assessment techniques and technology so as to ensure that all students are held accountable for their knowledge. The teachers are then encouraged to use their assessment findings to inform their practice within the classroom. There has been a tremendous amount of growth and excitement among the students and teachers as we have shifted the paradigm within the classroom to a more challenging learning environment.

Our staff is fully supported by the PTO, the Board of Education, and the greater community. Our PTO provides classroom grants directly to our teachers. The purpose of these grants is for teachers to be inspired to think outside of the 'budgetary box' and attain equipment and materials that enhance the instruction for all students. Digital microscopes, a wind tunnel, clay equipment in the art room, and a weather station monitor are examples of these supportive gifts. The Board of Education generously recognizes the work of our teachers. The budget is supported and staffing needs are met on an annual basis. Most recently, an after school program, focusing on writing and math, to meet the needs of our students who perform below 'goal' as measured by the state assessments, has been fully funded in an effort to close the academic gaps that exist for some of our students. Within our community, the Darien Technology Fund (DTF), a not-for-profit organization, has financed several technology based programs in our building. We have a computerized music lab, several mobile laptop stations, and a new MAC lab, as a result of the DTF's support for teacher initiatives. We are grateful for the overwhelming support we receive from the parents and community members and appreciate the direct impact it has on providing opportunities to our students and teachers.

We believe that teaching and learning go hand in hand. We also believe that it is the reflective cycle we have put into place that has led us to change our curricula in several areas in order to increase the academic rigor and hold our students accountable for demonstrating their knowledge on a regular basis. We fully recognize the critical role that our teachers, parents, and community members play in building a respectful community that is conducive and supportive of teaching and learning while we prepare every student for the 21st century.

PART IV - INDICATORS OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS

1. **Assessment Results:**

The state of Connecticut reports student performance in five achievement bands. They are 'below basic', 'basic', 'proficient', 'goal' and 'advanced'. The state has established the 'goal' range as mastery of the subject matter. It should be noted that the 'goal' standard set by the state of Connecticut is significantly higher than the 'proficient' standard needed to meet federal guidelines. In Darien, with over 90% of our students achieving the state standard in most subjects each year, our standards are even higher.

When viewing the data in the appendices, it is important to note that, in 2006, the 4th generation of the CMT was administered to all students in grades 3-8 for the first time. (The month of testing was also moved from October to March). This explains why there are only two years of data for grade 7. The state has cautioned against making direct comparisons between the 3rd and the 4th generation of assessments, however, general observations can be made.

Our subgroup scores contain the assessment results for our Special Education population. This data was available for grades 5-8 every year with the exception of the 2002-03 school year for 8th grade. The state does not keep data when the population for any one subgroup is below 20 students. Further information can be found at our state website: www.ctreports.com.

Some general observations regarding student success at Middlesex Middle School as measured by the CMT:

The most recent year of testing data (2006-07) has a higher percentage of students reaching mastery in grade 8 than in any previous year. This is especially notable when one considers that each generation of the CMT has raised the bar for our students.

There has been a significant increase in the percentage of students reaching the highest standard; 'advanced' in grades 6-8 over the past years.

When following a cohort over time, specifically the students who were tested in October of their 6th grade year (2004-05) and then again in March of their 8th grade year (2006-07), the percentage of students who reached the advanced level increased from 47% to 58% in math, from 38% to 49% in reading, and from 41% to 59% in writing. Following the same students in the Special Education sub-group, the percentage of students reaching goal went from 46% to 50% in math and from 40% to 53% in writing with reading remaining basically unchanged.

While the scores for our students with special needs lag behind those of our non-classified students, these scores are significantly above the state average for similar students in every category on every test. Looking at the most recent assessment of 8th graders in 2006-7:

Math: 71.9% of our Special Education students met the proficient standard vs. 39.8% of the state. 50% of the Special Education students at Middlesex met goal vs. 19.5% statewide.
Reading: the numbers were 59.4% at Middlesex vs. 39.4% at the state level meeting the proficient standard. The goal numbers were 37.5 % vs. 23.3%.
Writing: 75% of Middlesex Special Education students performed at the proficient level compared to 41.9% statewide. The goal numbers were 53.1% Middlesex vs. 20.5% state.

2. **Using Assessment Results:**

As a school we use assessment data to inform our instruction. At the beginning of the school year, we share the state testing results with our staff and highlight instructional decisions that may influence the outcome. Throughout the year, we refer back to this information through our curriculum monitor meetings, department meetings, faculty meetings, and teacher evaluation conferences. Our teachers take this information seriously as they reflect on their own practice while implementing curriculum changes to address any concerns within the assessment results.

Within the grade levels for English, our teachers use benchmarked writing assessments. Students are led through the scoring process so that they better understand their overall performance. Actual student work and locally developed rubrics are used to set goals with each student. Writing portfolios are sent home with each student. We require that both students and parents generate a written reflection about the work shown in the portfolio. Often this portfolio exercise will prompt conversations with the teachers and parents that

refer back to the standardized testing results. The goal is always to use the assessment results to inform the instructional practice in order to improve student performance.

Math assessment results are used within the math department as a means of reflecting on placement criteria, students performance and areas within the curriculum that need to be addressed. Monthly meetings include sharing instructional practices and the creation of grade level assessments to ensure consistency across grade level courses. Individual student results are always used to reconsider a student's placement in order to make sure the most appropriate placement is assured for each child.

These state assessment results help us to identify students in need of extra support either within or outside of the school day and assist us with monitoring student performance over time. The statewide reading assessment is used to identify students who are in need of reading support. Currently we have an after school program for writing and math for students who fall short of the state goal.

3. **Communicating Assessment Results:**

Middlesex is proud of our students' assessment results. We believe it is through high quality instruction, holding students accountable for quality work, facilitating student engagement, and using quality assessments to inform our instructional practices that our students are adequately challenged to demonstrate their learning everyday. Parents and teachers are kept fully informed of their students' progress and academic achievements throughout the year.

The results of the standardized testing are communicated in a variety of ways. Parents receive individual student reports on their child's results and the local papers report out the overall performance of the middle school students' performance. In addition, parents receive mid-quarter progress reports and an annotated report card whereby every student receives a personalized message to convey performance praise or concern with the report card printout each quarter. With these two mailings in mind, every parent receives written information about their child's performance every five weeks. PTO meetings and grade level Parent Open Mikes (informal parent meetings held in various homes) are also vehicles we use to communicate assessment results and gain parent feedback relating to instruction, curriculum, and assessment. Our grade levels are divided into academic teams and our school structure allows the teachers of each team to meet together on a daily basis. The teams coordinate the instructional programs for the students and closely monitor each student's progress. Parents are invited to schedule a conference with the team teachers at any point in the school year so that they can receive up to date information about their child's performance. The guidance counselors work closely with the team to arrange for these personal conferences.

For the past four years, the administrative team has communicated the Connecticut Mastery Tests assessment results to the entire faculty at the opening day faculty meeting. Growth over time, cohort tracking, and grade level results are highlighted and presented. Areas of focus are converted into a presentation on the school goals for the year. Following this general presentation, the administration meets with the curriculum monitors to review areas of strength and concerns that emerged through the standardized testing so that changes can be considered and implemented within the curriculum to ensure that all students are being exposed to the standards being assessed in the state testing. Specifically, the math and English teachers receive information presented by the assistant principal during department meetings and then individually evaluate the performance of their previous year's students. We have been tracking our own internal assessments and we compare these school assessments to the state results. This leads to discussions regarding the alignments or differences that emerge.

For students who consistently perform below the goal level, and who do not already receive special education services, a letter is sent to the parents inviting the students to participate in the After School Program in order for the child to take advantage of the opportunity to receive additional instruction in the areas of writing and/or math. We are hoping to add a reading component to this program during the 2008-09 school year.

4. **Sharing Success:**

We are proud of our students' success. At our school, we avail ourselves to visitors who contact us regarding our programs and we are always eager to share our insights and successes regarding teaching and learning. Colleagues from other districts call to inquire about our programs, our instructional practices, and our assessment practices and we welcome them in to talk to our teachers and observe our classes. In addition, the principal participates in the Middle School Council at our local Regional Education Services Council (Cooperative Educational Services) where we openly share ideas, concerns, progress, and results. This has been an ongoing collegial forum that allows for dialogue that causes reflection and clarity of ideas around instruction.

Within our building, teachers are encouraged to share their instructional successes. Over the past three years, teachers have been required to visit and observe other departmental classes so that ideas and observations could be shared and used as general reflections during departmental meetings. Classroom walk-throughs with curriculum monitors, teacher teams, central office staff, and other administrators have provided us the opportunity to observe common aspects of a lesson and discuss it using a common language and observation as a basis. This has been very beneficial from an administrative standpoint.

Sabbatical leaves and presentations at national and regional conferences is a common venue for our teachers to further share their successes and bring back new learning to their departments.

Professionally, we share our success by welcoming student teachers and interns from the local universities. Our teachers feel empowered and collegial by accepting student teachers and sharing their knowledge, expertise, and sense of purpose with these individuals who may soon be joining our profession. By being a support teacher to student teachers and/or mentors to our new teachers, the faculty has become more open to having people in their rooms, more willing to discuss their instructional decisions, more reflective about their practice, and more readily able to see themselves as instructional leaders within the building.

To share the successes of our students, we have needed to break down the barriers so that others are welcome in every class. To this end, we have teachers celebrate and share their successes at faculty meetings either as individuals or as representatives from the departments. In addition, we have implemented the creation of small professional learning groups among some of the departments by grade level in order to have a more focused and on-going dialogue about instruction and curriculum. To be a part of watching the walls come down, helping teachers to willingly share their classroom, and witnessing our students' successes, has been quite exciting!

PART V - CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. **Curriculum:**

Middlesex Middle School recognizes the unique strengths, needs, and interests of our students. We understand that our students come to us with a wide variety of experiences and abilities and our goal is to prepare them for the 21st century. For this reason, we work to engage our students in rich and varied curricula based on the Connecticut State Frameworks. Our district curricula has undergone several revisions over the past five years. In addition, our classrooms are equipped with presentation systems and each teacher has a tablet PC as a means of enhancing the curriculum through the use of technology on a regular basis. Academic teachers work collaboratively on teams, which meet daily.

Middlesex Middle School welcomes students from five elementary schools. Our eight-period day consists of five academic classes and two exploratory classes. All incoming sixth graders are enrolled in Math (either regular or advanced), LA I (Reading), LA II (Writing), Social Studies, and Science. World Language (Spanish or French) occurs twice per week for incoming sixth graders. Students have a choice of Orchestra, Band, Music Exploration, or Chorus to fulfill their music requirement. Music, Physical Education and Art/Computer occur twice per week and complete the typical schedule for a sixth grader. In seventh and eighth grade, Reading and Writing combine to create English and the World Language becomes an academic time block (5 times per week). Our school believes in an exploratory philosophy. To this end, Family Studies and Technology Education complement the Art/Computer quarterly courses once a student is in 7th and/or 8th grade so that all students have the opportunity to participate in a variety of learning experiences which will help them to realize their full potential and gain interests in areas with which they may be less familiar.

Our math program provides our students with a solid foundation of mathematical thinking and skills. It allows students to be challenged at every level and is flexible enough to accommodate the needs of adolescent students. The Middlesex math program is aligned to the state standards and curriculum revisions for all three grade levels has occurred over the past two years. In grade 6, students are placed into either Regular Math 6, Advanced Math 6, or Accelerated Math 6 (Pre-Algebra). Seventh grade consists of Regular Math 7, Accelerated Math 7 (Pre-Algebra), and Double Accelerated Math 7 (Algebra). Eighth grade consists of Regular Math 8 (Pre-Algebra), two levels of Algebra (Regular Algebra and Accelerated Algebra), and Accelerated Geometry. Within these levels there are ample opportunities for students to move up or down. Students may gain access to the levels via summer school, summer tutoring, and then passing the math placement tests. Students must attain specific grades to remain in the accelerated track for all three years. In Language Arts we do not have varying levels until Grade 8, where Advanced English is introduced. Throughout the three years, students are expected to read more complex materials and make deeper links between text, self, and the world. Our writing program within the language arts program uses the philosophy of the writing process and is guided by the Write Traits. Reading and writing are linked by themes. In Grade 6 the theme is Identity, in Grade 7 theme is Change, and in Grade 8 the theme is Isolation. Writing assessments have been used for the past three years to monitor and document student progress over time. Middlesex's science program is inquiry-based in its approach. The goal of the science program is to foster skills that require problem solving and cause students to question the world around us using scientific methodology to gather and analyze data to draw conclusions. The teachers at all three grade levels have revised the curriculum to ensure that the students have a broader knowledge base and more common experiences that align with the state frameworks. Earth, Life, and Physical Science are the major components to our three year science curriculum. The social studies curriculum provides students with a basic knowledge of history, geography, and culture. These themes, linked through essential questions, engage students in critical thinking activities that highlight the relationships between events, people, time, geography, and political changes that shape a country's people. We want our students to develop a genuine appreciation for the social contexts of people living in geographically different areas of the world, as well as an appreciation of our nation's democratic traditions and cultural diversity. The writing assignments in the social studies courses are designed to reinforce the writing program of our school's English department. Spanish and French are offered to all sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students. It begins as a cultural experience in sixth grade, while the 7th and 8th grades, together, complete Spanish I or French I. Upon completion of 8th grade, students are eligible to continue at level two of their target language as freshmen in high school. Our goal is for students to develop receptive and expressive communication skills in the target language so that they may be able to effectively communicate with a native speaker before leaving middle school. The Technology Education course exposes students to working with various textiles including plastics, metals and wood. The Family Studies program gives students the skills they need to make good short term decisions that will have positive long term results. Fostering healthy relationships and behaviors for life is the goal of the program. The Visual Arts program strives to expose students to a variety of visual and tactile materials to develop an appreciation of artistic expression, while the Music program provides the students with the opportunity to explore and appreciate music across various genres. The Physical Education

curriculum seeks to establish foundation level skills to help students develop healthy physical expectations and commitments for life. Our Computer Technology courses are meant to build upon the skills the students already have in order to develop skills for the use of technology and for the presentation of ideas.

Our school's overall curriculum provides ample opportunities for teachers to stretch student thinking, incorporate challenging ideas, and apply technology to classroom experiences on an ongoing basis. Our goal is to foster the skills and attributes of a well educated student who is ready for the 21st century.

2b. **(Secondary Schools) English:**

Developing excellent communication skills is necessary for students of the 21st century. Active reading skills and clarity of writing are essential to success, thus we put our focus on them. At the Grade 6 level, English is separated into two courses (Reading and Writing) for the sole purpose of honing in on the specific skills that are necessary to be successful readers and writers. Our LAI (Reading) class focuses on using active reading strategies that allow students to make meaning from the text. Students read fiction and non-fiction in this course and are required to read a book of their choice every night for homework. This required reading is documented on a reading record sheet and requires a parent's signature. In our LA2 (Writing) class students build upon their foundation skills in order to express themselves clearly through the written word. Grade 7 and 8 English combine reading and writing skills and strategies across several genres. Reading and writing activities often parallel each other, i.e., if reading poetry, the instruction of writing poetry co-exists. The six writing traits are embedded at all grade levels into the writing process. The use of Writers' Workshop is being implemented within the English classes. Striking the balance between reading and writing to promote high levels of literacy has been an on-going goal for our English Department.

It is our belief that the time allotted for pleasure reading develops a ritual that will promote lifelong reading. As a school, we embrace our Sustained Silent Reading time. During homeroom, students are to read an 'outside reading book of their choice' for twenty minutes each morning. This practice has set a tone for reading and a clear expectation that reading is an important part of our day. Our librarians are a constant resource for our students as they are readily available to all students to assist them with identifying and selecting appropriately engaging independent reading books that are geared toward their level. Conversely, our librarians seek student input when determining book selections, book talks, and book purchases. In addition, teachers encourage 'good' reading habits during this SSR time.

English and Social Studies teachers have been trained in the Write Traits writing program and use rubrics to provide feedback to the students with regards to idea development, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, and conventions for their written work. The English teachers are integral members of the academic teams and often provide guidance and support to their colleagues with regards to incorporating clear writing expectations within the content areas. Over the past three years, we have focused on establishing common language and expectations across the English classes. To this end, English teachers are holistically scoring each others' students work. This has been a valuable professional opportunity for the teachers allowing them to become more reflective and communicative about their own expectations, lesson designs, and results from their students. Educational Research Bureau (ERB) has also been hired to do periodic essay scoring so that teachers can become increasingly aware of their own scoring standards when compared to an outside scoring agency. Classroom instruction now also includes teaching the students how to objectively score essays so that they are fully aware of the aspects they need to enhance within their own writing. For all three grade levels, these benchmarked assessment results are being recorded over time so that teachers, parents, and students can monitor student progress.

For students who may opt for more direct reading strategies, we offer a Developmental Reading class. The purpose of this class is to address specific reading skills such as finding the main idea, identifying supporting details, and delving into the character's actions and decisions while linking the text to self and world experiences. Although this course is open to all students, most of the students who select this course do so in lieu of a world language.

For the past three years we have had an after school writing and math program for students who consistently perform below goal in reading, writing and/or math. Because of the additional instruction provided by certified teachers, these 'invited students' have shown marked improvement. Next year we are proposing that we extend the after school program to include a reading component.

3. **Additional Curriculum Area:**

Because we believe it is imperative that students acquire a solid foundation in mathematics as they prepare for the 21st century, we have been evaluating our math program and placement criteria. Over the past four years we have altered the math curriculum and placement criteria in order to create a rigorous program that is flexible enough to accommodate the developmental needs of the adolescent student. We have worked to improve the articulation between the 5th grade and 6th grade teachers in order to gain a smooth transition from a language based elementary math program to a more traditional middle school math program. To this end, 6th grade teachers observe 5th grade math classes and have ample opportunities to dialogue about student and program needs. At the other end, we have been improving our 8th to 9th grade articulation as well through constant communication between 8th and 9th grade math teachers and the middle school and high school curriculum monitors. Through these dialogues we have been able to be more reflective about the expectations for our students and the use of various instructional methods we are delivering within the classroom.

Two years ago, we adopted a new textbook series for grades 6 and 7 so that we could increase the rigor of our overall math program and provide greater opportunities for application of math concepts as they relate to higher order thinking levels and real life experiences. This text book series has been expanded to grade 8 this year. We have various levels that are fluid and flexible. A percentage of our students take advantage of summer time opportunities to move up from year to year within the math program. Although state tests are not the only indicator of success, we are at an historic high with regard to our students' math performance.

Due to a change in our curriculum, the 6th grade advanced math program is now equal to the regular 7th grade program. We also allow for our top math students to accelerate into the pre-algebra program in grade 6. The sequence of courses that students then follow from 6th to 8th grade is established, however, students have the opportunity to move up or down a level depending upon their own commitment level to challenge. Department dialogue about appropriateness of challenge, rigor, instructional practices, and student capabilities is ongoing.

It is because of our belief that we should acknowledge the developmental differences of the early adolescent child, that we allow for the necessary flexibility within our programs. We feel that the different the levels of challenge that we provide appropriately fits our school's mission as we strive to education the whole child.

4. **Instructional Methods:**

Instructional Methods: Generally speaking, our classes are heterogeneously mixed. We do, however, have levels of math in grade 6 through 8 and we have advanced English in grade 8 only. We use different instructional methods to address the wide variety and abilities of students within each class. Co-teaching has been a part of the Middlesex classroom for 15 years. There are now eight to twelve co-taught classes at each grade level. Special Education teachers are scheduled to meet with academic teams on a daily basis. This provides on-going professional sharing of instructional strategies and required modifications for various students on a daily basis. Within the classroom, the co-teaching structure allows for immediate support to both identified students and those students who need just a bit more clarity to be successful in the class.

Within our professional development activities, the backward design model has been presented and encouraged throughout the school. Teachers have been exploring lesson design by determining what students should know and be able to do at the end of the lesson and then selecting meaningful learning activities to engage all students.

Large group, small group, the use of rubrics and expectation guidelines, the incorporation of technology to enhance instruction, a variety of questioning techniques, increasing the student-to student dialogue to increase student engagement with the content are all focused on through teacher evaluation and staff development opportunities.

5. **Professional Development:**

We pride ourselves in being an organization that is willing to teach and learn from each other. Teachers share classrooms and are willing to share their knowledge in a variety of ways. Our community is supportive of each other and our teachers see themselves as mentors to each other.

As a staff, over the past four years we have focused our professional development on three main areas, recognizing though, that they are interrelated. The first area is addressing the level of cognitive demand within the classroom by critical curriculum review. The second area is developing common assessment that are high level and consistent across the grade levels within department. And the third area is using the technology to enhance lessons that engage all students.

Over the past four years, each of our academic areas have undergone a curriculum review. Teachers have had time to discuss the essential elements of the curriculum and work side by side to develop meaningful lessons that require students to take the knowledge and apply it in a meaningful way on a regular basis. This new practice lead us to look critically at the discrepancies between the cognitive demand our students were being asked to do in the classroom and our low level assessments we were having them complete. We realized we needed to raise the bar for all students by having students demonstrate their knowledge through application, using essential questions as the bridge. Teachers needed information to better understand and examine their own curriculum and instructional practices. We introduced them to the Understanding By Design model and had them work with it within their department level meetings to design lessons that challenge all students. What emerged through the process was the need to move from common end-of-year assessments to common unit assessments that occur throughout the year in order to build a more consistent experience for all students across each grade level.

As a result of this professional development journey, several areas of our academic programs have seen changes. Our math programs now have new placement criteria and new math books to more rigorously challenge the students at each of the levels. New social studies books were purchased and a realignment of the science curriculum took place in order to align more closely with the state frameworks. In the English department, teachers have been developing benchmarked assessments that are cross scored by the grade level teachers and/or being scored by ERB in grades 7 and 8. All of these changes have been the positive outgrowths of our professional development efforts.

Today's students are of the 'digital era'. We believe that when students are engaged through technology, they are more attentive and can make connections that would otherwise not be made. Our teachers have the equipment in their rooms (i.e., presentation systems with tablets) but we needed to help them push out of their comfort zones to use the technology. We are not at 100% yet, however, by using 'teacher leaders' to provide support, use of our 'instructional technology' specialist to help explore ideas to make them possible, and by allowing department time with the expectation of integrating technology into units, we are making progress. In addition, we have been encouraging teachers to use a shared library and share lessons using technology within and across their departments. As an example: our world language teachers were voted as Best in the State for their presentation at the Connecticut COLT conference for demonstrating the integration of technology in their presentation called 'That was Then, This is Now'. The comfort zone is being pushed and the expectation, which is reinforced through professional development opportunities and the teacher evaluation process, is that teachers will use technology to enhance their lessons and increase student engagement.

PART VII - ASSESSMENT RESULTS

Subject Math Grade 6 Test Connecticut Mastery Test

Edition/Publication Year Generation 4 Publisher State of Connecticut

	2006-2007	2005-2006	2004-2005	2003-2004	2002-2003
Testing Month	March	March	October	October	October
SCHOOL SCORES*					
% "Meeting" plus % "Exceeding" State Standards Goal and Advanced	90	88	90	89	87
% "Exceeding" State Standards Advanced	63	50	47	43	36
Number of students tested	352	366	374	315	372
Percent of total students tested	100	100	100	100	100
Number of students alternatively assessed	0	0	0	0	4
Percent of students alternatively assessed	0	0	0	0	1
SUBGROUP SCORES					
1. Special Education					
% "Meeting" plus % "Exceeding" State Standard Goal and Advanced	46	47	46	40	44
% "Exceeding" State Standards Advanced	16	11	4	3	0
Number of students tested	44	38	26	30	39
2.					
% "Meeting" plus % "Exceeding" State Standard					
% "Exceeding" State Standards					
Number of students tested					
3.					
% "Meeting" plus % "Exceeding" State Standard					
% "Exceeding" State Standards					
Number of students tested					
4.					
% "Meeting" plus % "Exceeding" State Standard					
% "Exceeding" State Standards					
Number of students tested					

Subject Math Grade 7 Test Connecticut Mastery Test

Edition/Publication Year Generation 4 Publisher Connecticut State Department of Education

	2006-2007	2005-2006 2004-2005	2003-2004	2002-2003
Testing Month	March	March		
SCHOOL SCORES*				
% "Meeting" plus % "Exceeding" State Standards Goal and Advanced	91	91		
% "Exceeding" State Standards Advanced	59	60		
Number of students tested	374	377		
Percent of total students tested	100	100		
Number of students alternatively assessed	1	1		
Percent of students alternatively assessed	0	0		
SUBGROUP SCORES				
1. Special Education				
% "Meeting" plus % "Exceeding" State Standard Goal and Advanced	38	52		
% "Exceeding" State Standards Advanced	15	18		
Number of students tested	40	27		
2.				
% "Meeting" plus % "Exceeding" State Standard				
% "Exceeding" State Standards				
Number of students tested				
3.				
% "Meeting" plus % "Exceeding" State Standard				
% "Exceeding" State Standards				
Number of students tested				
4.				
% "Meeting" plus % "Exceeding" State Standard				
% "Exceeding" State Standards				
Number of students tested				

Subject Math Grade 8 Test Connecticut Mastery Test

Edition/Publication Year Generation 4 Publisher Connecticut State Department of Education

	2006-2007	2005-2006	2004-2005	2003-2004	2002-2003
Testing Month	March	March	October	October	October
SCHOOL SCORES*					
% "Meeting" plus % "Exceeding" State Standards Goal and Advanced	95	94	87	85	91
% "Exceeding" State Standards Advanced	58	59	49	40	55
Number of students tested	373	314	364	295	272
Percent of total students tested	100	100	99	99	100
Number of students alternatively assessed	0	0	0	3	4
Percent of students alternatively assessed	0	0	0	1	1
SUBGROUP SCORES					
1. Special Education					
% "Meeting" plus % "Exceeding" State Standard Goal and Advanced	50	53	54	42	
% "Exceeding" State Standards Advanced	16	15	9	0	
Number of students tested	32	34	35	31	18
2.					
% "Meeting" plus % "Exceeding" State Standard					
% "Exceeding" State Standards					
Number of students tested					
3.					
% "Meeting" plus % "Exceeding" State Standard					
% "Exceeding" State Standards					
Number of students tested					
4.					
% "Meeting" plus % "Exceeding" State Standard					
% "Exceeding" State Standards					
Number of students tested					

Subject Reading (E) Grade 8 Test Connecticut Mastery Test

Edition/Publication Year Generation 4 Publisher Connecticut State Department of Education

	2006-2007	2005-2006	2004-2005	2003-2004	2002-2003
Testing Month	March	March	October	October	October
SCHOOL SCORES*					
% "Meeting" plus % "Exceeding" State Standards Goal and Advanced	92	91	84	86	96
% "Exceeding" State Standards Advanced	49	42	44	44	46
Number of students tested	373	314	364	295	272
Percent of total students tested	100	100	99	99	100
Number of students alternatively assessed	0	0	0	3	4
Percent of students alternatively assessed	0	0	0	1	1
SUBGROUP SCORES					
1. Special Education					
% "Meeting" plus % "Exceeding" State Standard Goal and Advanced	38	53	42	55	
% "Exceeding" State Standards Advanced	9	6	6	3	
Number of students tested	32	34	35	31	18
2.					
% "Meeting" plus % "Exceeding" State Standard					
% "Exceeding" State Standards					
Number of students tested					
3.					
% "Meeting" plus % "Exceeding" State Standard					
% "Exceeding" State Standards					
Number of students tested					
4.					
% "Meeting" plus % "Exceeding" State Standard					
% "Exceeding" State Standards					
Number of students tested					

Subject Reading (E) Grade 7 Test Connecticut Mastery Test

Edition/Publication Year Generation 4 Publisher Connecticut State Department of Education

	2006-2007	2005-2006 2004-2005	2003-2004	2002-2003
Testing Month	March	March		
SCHOOL SCORES*				
% "Meeting" plus % "Exceeding" State Standards Goal and Advanced	92	89		
% "Exceeding" State Standards Advanced	49	45		
Number of students tested	374	377		
Percent of total students tested	100	100		
Number of students alternatively assessed	1	1		
Percent of students alternatively assessed	0	0		
SUBGROUP SCORES				
1. Special Education				
% "Meeting" plus % "Exceeding" State Standard Goal and Advanced	54	52		
% "Exceeding" State Standards Advanced	18	7		
Number of students tested	40	27		
2.				
% "Meeting" plus % "Exceeding" State Standard				
% "Exceeding" State Standards				
Number of students tested				
3.				
% "Meeting" plus % "Exceeding" State Standard				
% "Exceeding" State Standards				
Number of students tested				
4.				
% "Meeting" plus % "Exceeding" State Standard				
% "Exceeding" State Standards				
Number of students tested				

Subject Reading (E) Grade 6 Test Connecticut Mastery Test

Edition/Publication Year Generation 4 Publisher Connecticut State Department of Education

	2006-2007	2005-2006	2004-2005	2003-2004	2002-2003
Testing Month	March	March	October	October	October
SCHOOL SCORES*					
% "Meeting" plus % "Exceeding" State Standards Goal and Advanced	90	87	89	84	84
% "Exceeding" State Standards Advanced	45	38	38	23	32
Number of students tested	352	366	374	315	372
Percent of total students tested	100	100	100	100	100
Number of students alternatively assessed	0	0	0	0	4
Percent of students alternatively assessed	0	0	0	0	1
SUBGROUP SCORES					
1. Special Education					
% "Meeting" plus % "Exceeding" State Standard Goal and Advanced	55	36	39	33	29
% "Exceeding" State Standards Advanced	9	5	4	3	11
Number of students tested	44	38	26	30	39
2.					
% "Meeting" plus % "Exceeding" State Standard					
% "Exceeding" State Standards					
Number of students tested					
3.					
% "Meeting" plus % "Exceeding" State Standard					
% "Exceeding" State Standards					
Number of students tested					
4.					
% "Meeting" plus % "Exceeding" State Standard					
% "Exceeding" State Standards					
Number of students tested					