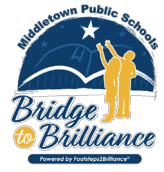




# Middletown's Innovative Citywide Literacy Strategy Demonstrates Historic Achievement Gains During the COVID 2020-21 School Year



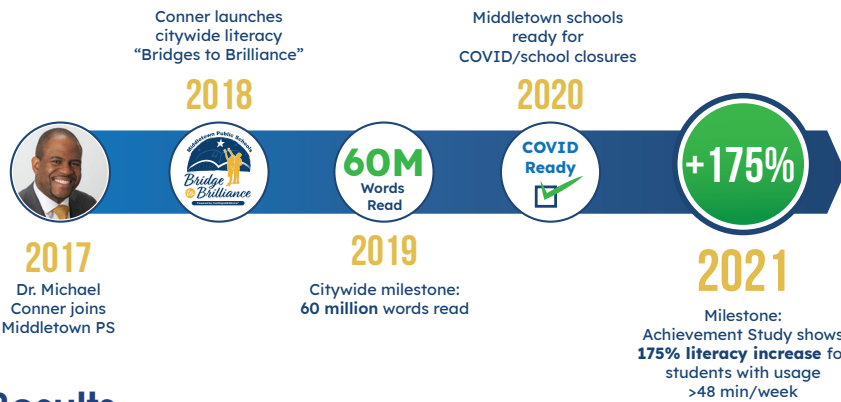
AUGUST 2021

MIDDLETOWN, CT

## Challenge

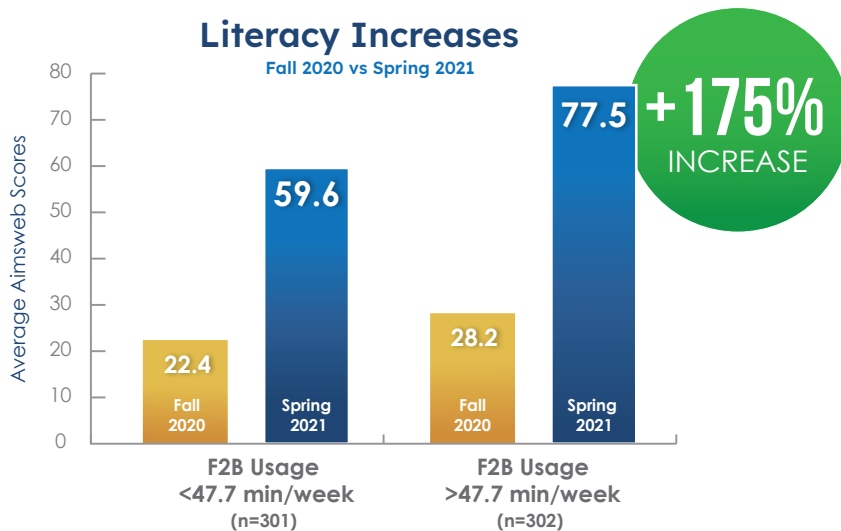
When Dr. Michael Conner, Superintendent, joined Middletown Public Schools in 2017, he rallied the entire community to create **"Bridge to Brilliance"**—a citywide literacy initiative, powered by Footsteps2Brilliance (F2B), to eliminate the preparation gap. Since 50% of his students qualified for Free and Reduced Lunch and only 37% of these 3rd graders were reading proficiently, this initiative focused on innovation and equity.

Middletown provided all children birth through 3rd grade with comprehensive, bilingual apps to prepare them for kindergarten and 3rd grade reading proficiency. The apps were accessible on any smartphones, tablets, and computers that families already owned. With this culture of innovation and equity, Middletown schools were proactively ready to flourish during the COVID school year.



## Results

"Bridge to Brilliance" yielded immediate results for all students. In fact, a 2021 study (n=603/K-1 students) proved that students with F2B app usage >47+ min/week saw a 175% increase on the Aimsweb assessment from Fall 2020 to Spring 2021. Similar findings demonstrated dramatic increases for historically underserved students: Free & Reduced +224%, SPED +141%, ELL +168%, Black +184% and Latinx +145%.



## DATA SINCE 2018

**246,000,000+**  
Words read

**404,000+**  
Books read

**63,000+**  
Hours reading

**82%**  
Average comprehension score

## LEADERSHIP TESTIMONIALS

*"We are disrupting early childhood education and trying to universalize it to close the preparation gap."*

Dr. Michael Conner, Superintendent  
Middletown Public Schools

*"Bridge to Brilliance ... sets the stage for the rest of our early learners' lives."*

Ed Bonilla, former VP, United Way

*"As a pediatrician, I'm interested in the [literacy] health of children because they are the future adults that are going to run this world and be the mayor and superintendent here."*

Dr. Cliff O'Callahan, Department Chair of  
Pediatrics Middlesex Hospital

*"This initiative is revolutionary for our city and our community."*

Edward Ford, Jr., Council Member,  
Middletown

## DISTRICT SNAPSHOT

Enrollment	4,620
Free/Reduced Lunch	50%
Special Education	15%
English Learners	4%
Black	20%
Latinx	20%



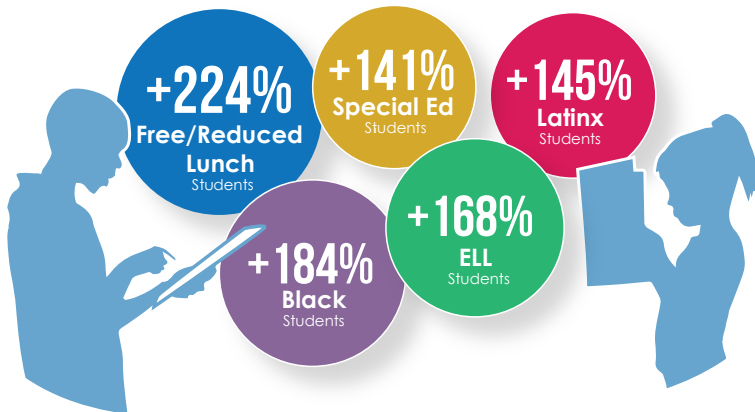
## Reaching Historically Underserved Students

The Office for Civil Rights, US DOE, warns us: "Even before the pandemic, many students of color faced significant barriers to educational opportunity—barriers that the pandemic appeared to be making even steeper." Middletown students were proactively set up for success (see below literacy increases during the 2020-21 COVID year.)

Dr. Conner states, "When we think about the 'after COVID' stage, we need to think about how we are going to reengineer education differently, reimagining what our system can look like, re-envisioning what our industry could become."

### Literacy Increases

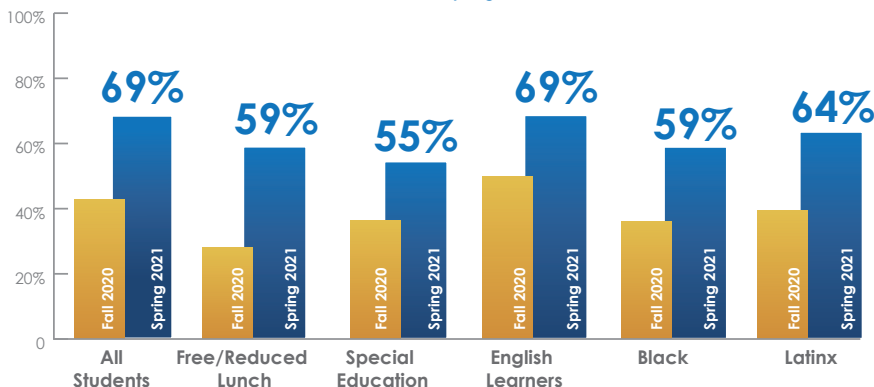
Fall 2020 vs Spring 2021



Historically, 51% of Middletown's 3rd graders read proficiently (34% for Free/Reduced Lunch students). The Aimsweb assessment includes a score category of Tier 1 that indicates strong promise of reading proficiency. After implementing "Bridges to Brilliance," 69% of Middletown students are showing strong promise of proficiency, and every subgroup is showing substantial gain.

### Increased Tier 1 Reading Proficiency

Fall 2020 vs Spring 2021



## Teachers Recommend Footsteps2Brilliance



9.2/10

Excited about  
Footsteps2Brilliance!



### Testimonials

"I love that we can see data on all students and are able to target specific skills."

Middletown Kindergarten Teacher

"This program will definitely support my students as they navigate through hybrid learning and asynchronous lessons."

Middletown 2nd Grade Teacher

"My daughter's skills are definitely getting stronger by using the app. She's recognizing the letters more just by seeing them and tracing them."

Middletown Parent

"I like the English/Spanish connection, reading/vocabulary, easy sign-on access for students, writing journal, engaging pictures, and diversity of characters/books."

Middletown Principal

"If we invest early in our children's lives, this will improve the trajectory of their education and the outcomes for success will be greater."

Dawn Dubay, School Readiness Coordinator,  
Middletown

## Future Sustainable Model

Enlisting the support of families, schools, and community partners through a Collective Impact Model is at the heart of Superintendent Conner's strategic vision to create an innovative and equitable birth through 3rd grade ecosystem. "Bridge to Brilliance" builds a future sustainable model by (1) harnessing stakeholder and community buy-in, (2) providing equity by closing the preparation, opportunity, quality and belief gaps, and (3) fostering a city-wide revitalization strategy that provides a return on investment by reducing chronic absenteeism, SPED misclassification and the dropout rate.

### Using the Disruptive Equity Framework to Eliminate the Achievement & Acceleration Gaps



Disruptive Equity Framework



## Citywide Impact

- ✓ Kindergarten Readiness
- ✓ 3rd Grade Reading Proficiency
- ✓ Equity for All Students
- ✓ Stakeholder & Community Buy-In
- ✓ Assessing and Adjusting the System
- ✓ Eliminating the Achievement & Acceleration Gaps
- ✓ Cost Savings

## 5 YEAR SAVINGS

Based on helping just 1 out of 10 at-risk students

**\$365K** Dropout Prevention

Less Chronic Absenteeism **\$542K**

**\$11.4M** Reduce SPED



Formula (3rd Grade Proficiency, 25% Drop Out Correlation, \$18,477 Per Pupil)

Formula (12.7% Chronic Absenteeism, \$102.65 ADA, 18 Days)

Formula (21.5% SPED, \$22,860.92 Per Pupil)

## Strategies for Spreading Innovation

How families are learning about the program.

