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Data: Middletown student literacy skills skyrocket by 175 percent, despite COVID challenges

Adam Hushin

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Middletown Public Schools students and educators worked in hybrid mode during the pandemic. Allison Shelley for American Education: Images of Teachers and Students in Action

MIDDLETOWN — Despite abnormal learning conditions during the pandemic, new data reveals that literacy skills among Middletown Public

Schools students increased drastically over the last year.

Based on results from the standardized Achievement Improvement Monitoring System, known as AIMSweb, assessment and data compiled by the application Footsteps2Brilliance, city students increased their literacy skills by 175 percent between the fall of 2020 and this spring.

The results indicate large increases for historically marginalized students in particular. Students who qualify for free and reduced school meals saw an increase in capabilities of 224 percent. Students receiving special education services saw a 141 percent rise, and Black and Latinex students saw increases of 184 and 145 percent, respectively.

Literacy skills include phonics, phonemic awareness, reading, writing, vocabulary, comprehension and grammar.

Superintendent Michael Conner is very pleased with the results. “We are exceedingly proud of our students, their families, and our teachers for having achieved this phenomenal increase,” he said.

Conner and other school officials credit this increase largely to the literacy initiatives that began in 2018 and continued throughout the pandemic. All students up to third grade were provided with access to Footsteps2Brilliance, a comprehensive, bilingual literacy app. It is accessible on any smartphone, tablet and computer, so learning was not interrupted when schools moved to a hybrid model.

Since the literacy program began, almost 250 million words have been read by Middletown students, according to the data released by Footsteps2Brilliance. The average reading comprehension score has risen to 82 percent.

These sharp increases came despite an environment that otherwise caused learning loss throughout the country. The loss was so significant that Connecticut formed the AccelerateCT Education Task Force, made up of more than 80 teachers, school administrators and staff, students, families and advocates, to combat this learning loss.

Schools Director of Communications Jessica B. Lavorgna said the period of learning loss makes the numbers even more impressive. “It’s definitely shocking data especially during COVID,” she said.

In fact, the district suggested that the pandemic may be a reason literacy

rates have risen, since the learning program was available online.

“While we cannot say for certain, COVID has brought increased academic use of electronic devices for students and their families,” Lavorgna said.

“This could be a contributing factor.”

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