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NIEMEYER - WORKING TO HELP MOVE MIDDLETOWN SCHOOLS TO THE NEXT LEVEL

MIDDLETOWN, R.I. (JULY 30, 2024) – A lot of times, the new boss likes to come in and shake things up right away.

William Niemeyer isn't like most bosses, though.

As the new Superintendent of Schools for Middletown, Niemeyer said he plans on doing a lot of observing and watching during Year 1 of his tenure instead of proposing sweeping changes.

But that doesn't mean Niemeyer — known as "Billy" to staff and friends — is taking it easy.

Minus brief vacation in June, it's been a busy summer for Niemeyer and his team, getting ready for opening day on Sept. 3, everyone working hard to make the 2024-2025 school year the best in recent memory.

"The changes that folks can expect from us are going to be subtle, but powerful," Niemeyer said. "I really want to spend time as a year one superintendent watching and learning about what goes on here in the Middletown Public Schools. I think it is key that we identify what has been working, and what hasn't been.

"Our School Committee and administrative team are going to be doing work around our strategic plan. We need to really hammer out our priorities,



and outline a blueprint that shows the path to success. I want our team to be sharing our progress towards our goals, so that there is no question about our efforts. This requires all stakeholders, sitting at the table, working together to move our schools towards excellence.”

A big part of this, Niemeyer said, is opening up the schools more to parents and the public so there’s more transparency about what’s happening — and why.

“I believe we have a lot of positive momentum at this point, and it is important that we keep moving forward, being very intentional about our efforts to make Middletown a better place,” Niemeyer said. “I’m looking to start community walkthroughs in our buildings so that community members, town leaders and partners can see the good work that is happening. I think that folks need to see first hand what goes on in the schools.”

Niemeyer will be the first new superintendent for the district in more than 25 years, replacing Rosemarie Kraeger who retired at the end of June.

Working closely with Kraeger during the transition, Niemeyer said the district has a solid foundation in place, but growth is possible — and achievable.

None of this would be happening without the outstanding teachers and staff across the district as well as strong core support from the parents and the community.

“The thing that makes me most proud of the Middletown Public Schools is the people here, hands down,” Niemeyer said. “Our staff is incredibly passionate about what they do. You wouldn’t believe the stories I could tell you about folks going above and beyond.

“The students here have made me want to stay, and work even harder for this town. We have a great mix of kids who all are working towards their personal goals. There is so much optimism within the kids and our staff, and that is inspiring as an educator.”

As one example, Niemeyer noted by the end of the summer, 25 percent of the teaching staff will have earned special state endorsements voluntarily to help them support English Language Learners and strategies to assist all students.

“The excitement is palatable,” Niemeyer said. “Teachers *want* to be the best they can be. To have 25 percent of the staff set aside a good part of their summer to earn those extra credentials on their own? I don’t know of a district anywhere that could say that.

“As a district, we’re going to continue to work hard to make sure we have all the supports possible in place for our students and teachers to succeed. We’re also rallying to assist our ELL students and provide opportunities so we can grow as a district and community together. Everyone is here because they want to be here. We love this community and you can really feel the passion for teaching when you are in the classroom. Heck, you can see it in the summer school classrooms right now.”

Everywhere he looks, Niemeyer said he sees positive growth and opportunities.

“We are excited to bring in new talent at Gaudet Middle School, with the hiring of a new principal,” Niemeyer said. “Our High School team has really been focused on their academies and providing quality CTE (Career & Technical Education) opportunities for our high school students. I think that folks will really see these programs taking shape in the near future. Principal Donna Sweet and her team have been developing strong partnerships that provide great opportunities for kids.

“I think there has been a general enthusiasm this summer as we head towards the new school year. Staff and families have been very supportive on my new role here, and I believe that we as a school community can channel that enthusiasm into some wins for our district. We have so much to offer here, I believe that we need to continue offering opportunities for success for all students.”

Hired as the principal at Gaudet in 2021, Niemeyer worked as principal of Frank D. Spaziano Elementary School in Providence. Before that, he was assistant principal at Central High School in the capital city of Rhode Island.

Coming to the district, Niemeyer won allies and backers immediately with his low-key, positive approach to getting things done.

A lot of times, school principals are seen as out-of-touch, hands off administrators, but Niemeyer took the exact opposite approach, one that clearly comes naturally. Visit with him and it’s more likely you’ll see a smiling face and hear him joking with students to make a point instead of a heavy handed lecture.

“Middletown has been such a great place to work for me,” Niemeyer said. “I was told by a resident when I came here, that Middletown is the best kept secret. I was told that we have diversity, but we also have unity. Kids here grow up side by side, are empathetic towards each other, and support each other as they move through the schools.

“Our group of students are also welcoming and supportive of our military families that are passing through. I have seen them go above and beyond to make our military students feel included. It has really been heartwarming. It really does take all kinds of folks to make the world go round.”

At the same time, Niemeyer said there’s significant involvement from parents in the schools, something he’d like to see grow even more as superintendent.

“When I came to Middletown, I quickly learned that the parents are strong advocates for their children, and their children's learning,” Niemeyer said. “I think this advocacy is an important factor when thinking about school improvement. The high expectations that our parents, our staff and our school community are what needs to drive the work ahead of us. I am sure that with the schools, the families and the community all working towards supporting student success, that we will get there.”

Based on everything he's seen and heard, Niemeyer said there's quite a bit of excitement for the new middle-high school just north of the existing Gaudet Middle School and related improvements to the district's facilities. Visit <https://mdl.town/SBC> for more about those plans.

"Folks are excited for our new school buildings and grade configurations," Niemeyer said. "From what I'm hearing, there's a lot of momentum building around a new chapter for Middletown. Rosemarie has a longstanding legacy that will be difficult to live up to and there's a great foundation in place for the rest of us. Now, it's up to us to continue to push towards excellence. Our kids deserve it."

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